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COMMONWEAL

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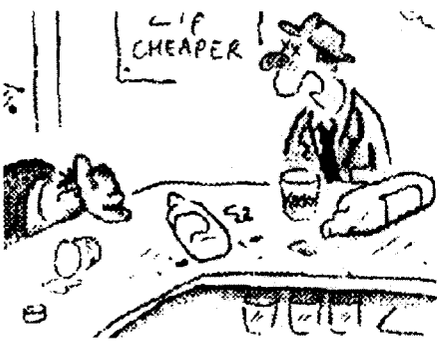

"I've had enough—I'm starting to understand the Irish peace process."

Our intrepid correspondent looks at Saint Patrick's Day festivities in New York and Washington, and their impact on the Irish peace process.

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To the Editors

The legacy of 'Roe'

The PBS documentary "Murder on Abortion Row," discussed in your editorial ["Two Families," February 23] was, in my view, a stunning indictment of the 1973 Supreme Court decision in *Roe* v. *Wade*. For, whatever the ultimate judgment on the sanity or guilt of John Salvi, this tragic event is just another example of the civil war that has existed in this country since that unfortunate decision was handed down. This second American civil war is comparable in every way to the first and, like the latter, it is not likely to end until the Constitution is amended appropriately. This wanton destruction of human life—Shannon Lowney, Lee Ann Nichols, and the other victims (not to mention the clinic abortions and John Salvi himself)—is nothing less than the continuing legacy of *Roe* v. *Wade* in America.

PAUL CORRAO, M.D.
Auburn, Maine

Raunchiness ignored

On the strength of a favorable review in the *New Yorker*, my wife and I chose, much to our later regret, to see *Leaving Las Vegas*. The film was appalling, in terms of raunchiness of language and action: a gutter experience. The tone is indicated by a gratuitous scene in which the hooker heroine is shown urinating and wiping herself. At least she did it in the bathroom!

Later we reread the verdict passed by the *New Yorker*: "Although the film is terribly, crushingly sad, its honesty is refreshing; it names its poison and downs it, neat." Perhaps "honesty" is the modern term for vulgarity.

Then I noticed Richard Alleva's review of the film in *Commonweal* [February 23]. Though he mentioned that the film "made nearly a clean sweep of the New York Film Critics Circle and National Film Critics awards," Alleva did not seem that impressed. After dealing kindly with the photography, he made good points about the film's lack of balance and motivation—but still not a word about its seaminess. Why not?

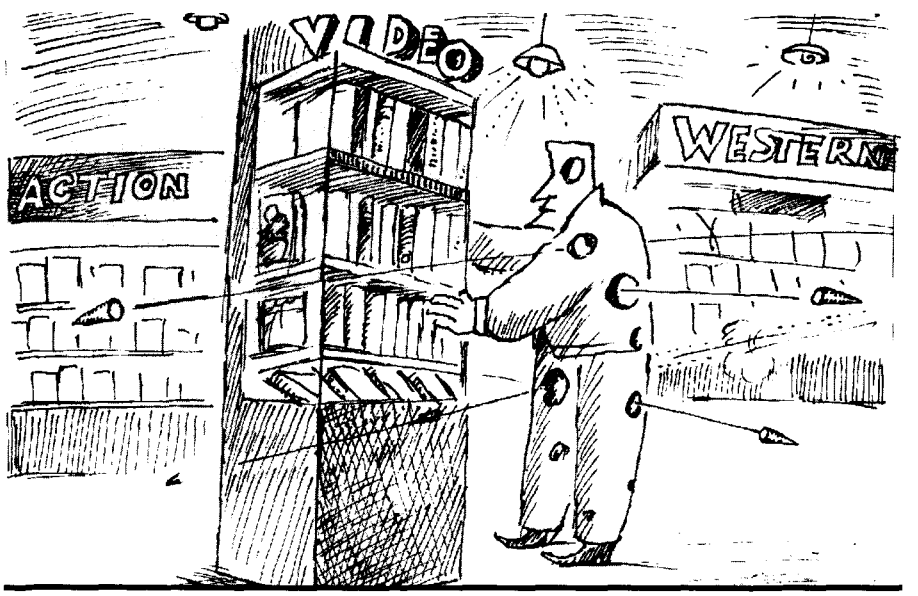
Stop the world. I want to get off!

EDWARD F. ROGERS
Middletown, N.J.

The repentant thief

What startled me in the film *Dead Man Walking*, not mentioned in Richard Alleva's review [February 23], was the symbolism of the "good thief" on Calvary, evoked by Matthew Poncelet's asking for forgiveness before being executed.

MRS. JULIA SCHADE
Fairfield, Conn.



Hang on to Alleva

I hope you are not thinking of letting Richard Alleva get away from you, just because of a few disgruntled readers. He is a credit to your judgment in choosing columnists, and his brilliant response to John Hagen last September should have been compelling evidence of his value. He persuaded me to see *Pulp Fiction*, after long hesitation—and to appreciate it as I might not have on my own. A Hollywood film about redemption! Why don't you start future columns with his own proclamation: "Sooner or later, a movie's or novel's moral delinquency betrays itself through aesthetic delinquency."

BARRY GILL
Napa, Calif.

Cockayne's Syndrome

Sara Maitland's review [February 9] of Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, contained a reference to Cockayne's Syndrome (CS) that wasn't quite on the mark. Ms. Maitland wrote that CS is a disease characterized by "a body that grows, and therefore ages, twice as fast as anyone else's."

CS, a genetic-based disease, is extremely rare, having been medically reported worldwide about sixty times. CS children do age prematurely. But their physical size is radically stunted, rarely exceeding that of a typical three-year-old. Other CS symptoms occurring in documented cases have included accelerated hair, bone, and muscle loss, early hearing and sight impairment, and severe digestion problems. There is no ongoing research being conducted on CS.

GREGORY G. MAHER
Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y.

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School vouchers

State aid to religious or private primary and secondary schools in the form of tuition vouchers or a tuition tax credit is a worthy public-policy goal. Vouchers would benefit numerous families burdened with paying for both public schools and for the schools of their choice; would facilitate variety in the types of schooling available; and would benefit many poor families whose children often attend unsafe and ineffective inner-city public schools.

The Supreme Court's unnecessarily broad interpretation of the First Amendment's establishment clause has long raised questions about the so-called "wall of separation" between church and state. Favoring one sect or faith, or conversely, placing special disabilities on religious exercise, contradict the intent of the First Amendment. The separation between church and state should be real, but the wall should be permeable enough to encourage the vigorous expression of religious opinion and attachments.

Contrary to the Supreme Court's strict separationist view, religious commitment, tempered by the discipline of democratic practice and rights, is no threat to tolerance or civic peace. Indeed, the virtues of common concern and individual responsibility that religion at its best cultivates are indispensable to democracy. "Citizenship," writes philosopher Michael Sandel (*Democracy's Discontent*, Harvard), "requires certain habits and dispositions, a concern for the whole, an orientation to the common good." Those virtues can only be nurtured through the attachments of community membership. In America, religious communities have long played a central role in building such ties. Withholding tax dollars from taxpayers who choose religious schools for their children imposes a double infirmity: It circumscribes religious freedom while depriving our democracy of much needed moral resources.

"School choice" has been the rallying cry for those opposed to what they call the state monopoly on school funding. But the argument for diversity in schooling must not rest on free exercise or autonomy rights alone. The state's interest in an educated, informed, and engaged citizenry is compelling. That interest cannot be served by public schools alone. "No single model or means of education is appropriate to the needs and desires of all persons," a recent statement on educational reform by United States Catholic Conference (*Origins*, February 22, 1996) reminds us. In pursuit of the common good of educational excellence for all—especially in a society as pluralistic as our own—the state should encourage diversity, not monopoly, in schooling. More than thirty years of federal aid to religious universities and the experience of almost every other Western democracy demonstrate the wisdom of such an approach.

Opposition to vouchers rests on strong court precedents, but often finds allies among religious groups who fear that the strings attached to government aid compromise religious integrity. Such fears may be justified, but the experience of Catholic and other religiously affiliated colleges suggest that a middle way can be found. Perhaps the most persuasive objection to vouchers concerns the potential damage to an already besieged public school system. It is predicted that vouchers will encourage an exodus from the public schools that will leave

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behind only the most difficult or unprepared students. Such worries are not unreasonable, but they are exaggerated. One possible way to safeguard against such an outcome would be to require schools accepting vouchers to reserve a certain percentage of their enrollment for children who are economically disadvantaged.

A picture of the public schools on the verge of abandonment is overdrawn. The social patterns of most communities as well as decades of tax investment continue to make public schooling attractive for the vast majority of families. Philosophical allegiance to the public schools, even among many religious Americans, is quite strong, as the recent defeat of school-choice initiatives in California and other states indicates. Most important, there is considerable evidence that many public schools do a good job (*see* Philip Altbach, p. 33). Confronted with an expanded private-school franchise, there are good reasons to think that public schools will rise to the challenge, not collapse.

How the public and private schools can best work together for the national good is the real educational and public-policy question. In that light, the financial disability historically imposed on families choosing education in a religious setting seems an obvious restriction of free speech and free exercise. Vouchers, by giving tax monies to parents and not directly to religious or private schools, promise to remedy that injustice without violating the First Amendment's "endorsement" test.

Admittedly, the devil is in the details. State laws funneling public funds directly to religious institutions have been ruled unconstitutional. Nevertheless, the Court has allowed public monies to pay for the busing of children to parochial and private schools, and has even approved of a Minnesota law granting tuition tax credits for the same. These rulings suggest that financial assistance given to individuals rather than schools may pass constitutional scrutiny.

A variety of schemes for tuition vouchers is before many state legislatures. As a matter of public policy, voucher plans should be calibrated to bring maximum benefit not to those who can already afford private schools, but to those who cannot. Inequality in school financing and quality is a national scandal. Despite the constitutional guarantee of equal education for all students, school funding remains tied to local property taxes. The quality of public schooling can thus usually be traced to income level. Those with money can buy their way into wealthy towns or private schools. Only those without financial resources lack real choice. For vouchers to correct such inequality they must cover close to 90 percent of average per-pupil cost in any region. To help insure a sound tax base for the public schools, perhaps vouchers should be means-tested as well.

In sum, giving the very poor a measure of financial control over the education of their children will greatly expand their stake in the schools and the community. At the same time, vouchers will lift the financial penalty from parents who choose religiously oriented or private schools, correcting a long-standing injustice and promoting institutions and virtues vital to our civic culture. And finally, by stimulating diversity and regulated competition, vouchers may even bring greater efficiency and energy to the public schools.

In other words, there is good reason to believe that in doing the right thing in regard to those seeking nonpublic education for their children, we will also be doing the best thing for all Americans. That, at least, should be the aim.

"We spent a lot of money educating him, so if you want Junior's opinion, you'll have to pay for it."

POSTSCRIPTS

BRING ON THE EUTHANIZERS ■ "Court-assisted suicide," last issue's editorial (March 22, 1996), tried to convey the startling nature of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals's March 6 decision: physician-assisted suicide is o.k.; perhaps it is not even suicide. As well, the editorial lamented Judge Stephen Reinhardt's eagerness to collapse all moral and medical categories surrounding care of the dying—the very means by which patients, physicians, and families have guided their decisions in the final weeks and days of life.

The *Wall Street Journal* (March 15, 1996) ran an interview with Judge Reinhardt, in which he said proudly of his opinion, "I think this may be my best ever." However, the opinion of Judge Robert R. Beezer, dissenting from the majority opinion, which may or may not be Judge Beezer's "best ever," has the good grace to articulate much of what is at stake in the issue of physician-assisted suicide. An excerpt follows:

BEEZER'S DISSENT ■ "The issue of whether mentally competent, terminally ill adults have a constitutionally protected right to commit physician-assisted suicide is one of

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the most difficult, divisive, and heart-wrenching issues facing the courts today. The correlative issue of whether terminally ill loved ones ought to be allowed to commit assisted suicide is likewise one of the most difficult, divisive, and heart-wrenching issues facing American society. The former is a constitutional issue for the courts; the latter is a moral question for the society as a whole.

"The two issues are not the same. The latter requires us—all of us, not just judges—to engage in a soul-searching dialogue about our collective morals. Given the tremendous advances in twentieth-century medical technology and public health, it is now possible to live much longer than at any time in recorded history. We have controlled most of the swift and merciful diseases that caused most deaths in the past. In their place are a host of diseases that cause a slow deterioration of the human condition....This change has forced us to step back and reexamine the historic presumption that all human lives are equally and intrinsically valuable. Viewed most charitably, this reexamination may be interpreted as our struggle with the question of whether we as a society are willing to excuse the terminally ill for deciding that their lives are no longer worth living. Viewed less charitably, the reexamination may be interpreted as a mere rationalization for housecleaning, cost-cutting, and burden-shifting—a way to get rid of those whose lives we deem worthless. Whether the charitable or uncharitable characterization ultimately prevails is a question that must be resolved by the people through deliberative decision making in the voting booth,...or in the legislatures. This issue we, the courts, need not—and should not—decide."

OF SEVERAL MINDS

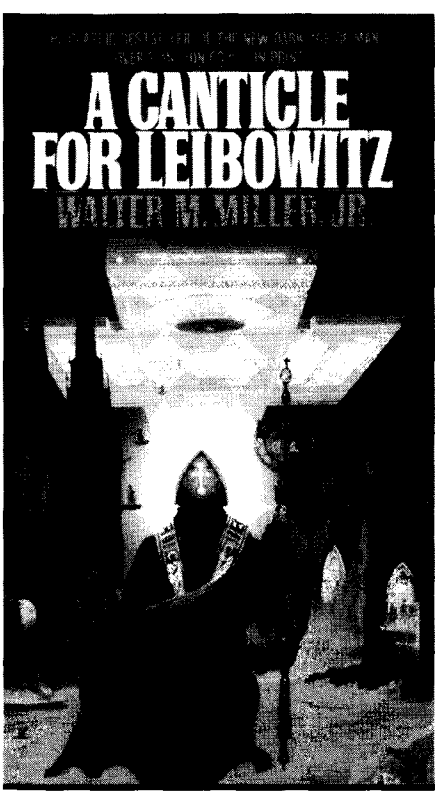
JOHN GARVEY

A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ

A eulogy for Walt Miller

Walt Miller shot himself in January. His suicide followed by several months the death of his wife Anne. Many readers of *Commonweal* will know him as Walter M. Miller, Jr., author of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, a fine, compassionate, and angry novel praised by C. S. Lewis, Walker Percy, and many others. If the movement against nuclear warfare could be said to have an anthemic novel, this might be it, but the novel was much more than a political blast. First published in 1959, it told of a post-nuclear-holocaust world in which humanity goes through three stages, roughly equivalent to the Dark Ages, the Renaissance, and our own time. The novel is centered on the Albertian Order of Leibowitz, a monastic community which has preserved as much of the old world's learning as possible. Despite the order's best efforts, the human race moves once again toward self-destruction, and a remnant leaves earth to try again, somewhere else. Walker Percy found Miller's vision of the future more compelling than those of George Orwell or Aldous Huxley, and wrote that "the book has a secret....The peculiar nature of the secret is that the book cannot be reviewed. For either the reviewer doesn't get it or, if he does, he can't tell."

In 1983, when the concern about nuclear warfare was a powerful and constant presence, I asked *Notre Dame Magazine* if I could interview Miller. They agreed, paid for a trip to Florida, where he lived, and paid for the consequent article as well. I felt like I was getting away with something. I left the icy midwest for Florida in January to meet a writer whose book I admired, saw pelicans outside of a zoo for the first time in my life, saw real palm trees too, and spent a couple of days with someone who would continue as a correspondent and a friend from then on.



When I wrote to him, asking if he would agree to the interview, he said he would meet me, but mentioned the fact that he had drifted away from Roman Catholicism and was now "somewhere west of Zen and east of the Son...." If Walt could be said to have a religion it was a kind of go-it-on-your-own Buddhism. He told me at one point during our couple of days together that he missed the Eucharist, but after his encounters with post-Vatican II Catholicism he was reminded more of the Protestantism of his childhood than of anything that had attracted him to Catholicism, and there was nothing much to hold him.

Walt was a veteran of World War II, and participated in the shelling of the Benedictine Abbey at Monte Casino. "I went to war with very romantic ideas about war," he told me, "and I came back sick." He was not sure why he became a Catholic, Walt said, and his relationship with Catholicism was a rocky one. *A Canticle for Leibowitz* was written dur-

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ing a painful time: he was trying to piece a shattered marriage back together (and succeeded: he and Anne were married for fifty years); he was having a difficult time with the church; and in some ways the novel was also an argument with his anti-Semitic father, an admirer of Hitler.

The novel developed a strong following and has been in print for most of the time since its first publication. Walt was never able to complete another novel: any attempt at writing one brought back the memory of a painful time too keenly. Shortly after the interview I received a letter: "John, I think my case of stifled creativity came from a sudden loss of the power to tell MY OWN story, a disability which began afflicting me during and just after the Leibowitz years. All fiction is autobiographical. All fictional characters are the author himself, in various roles, accepted or rejected, conscious or otherwise. If I felt too ashamed of my own life to tell my own story, how could I tell any man's story? I'm sixty now, and surely shouldn't give a damn." Later in the same letter: "I swore off booze again last week (I do it thrice annually). I did a lot of swearing last week, come to think of it. I swore at a Sears service manager, a local radio station, a broker, and, *in absentia*, the archbishop of Canterbury."

We corresponded from then on. Walt's letters were wonderful and often very funny. Recurring themes were writing and its difficulties, the pros and cons of computers, the evils of the modern nation-state, meditation and the differences between Buddhism and Western spirituality, and guns. Walt was the only person I've known whose politics were vaguely leftish who was also an ardent supporter of the National Rifle Association. He was antinuclear war, but progun and in fact prowarrior. In his last letter to me he wrote, "Man is biologically a professional poet and weaponsmith, not necessarily in that order....I also opine that the natural law legitimates *Seppuku*." It wasn't the first mention of suicide in his letters.

On August 8 of last year he sent a note to people who had known Anne telling of her unexpected death. "By her own request," he wrote, "there will be no funeral, no service, no one is invited, and she will be cremated, probably tomorrow. Neither condolences nor floral offerings (or any other kind) will be accepted. If you want to do a good deed, kiss an enemy. She hasn't gone anywhere. She 'is that which you see before you; begin to reason about it and you at once fall into error.' (Huang Po)...It was my honor to have been married to her for fifty years, two months, and five days, and I can say that everyone who really knew her loved her...."

As she did him. During the first evening I spent with Walt and Anne he left the room to get a book, and Anne looked up and said to me, "Isn't he something?"

Knowing that he admired Miller's book I sent Walker Percy a copy of the interview, and he wrote back: "I am both fascinated and dismayed by the Miller interview. For years I've speculated about this man, wondering where *Canticle* came from....Still a mystery: it's as if everything came together by some felicitous chance, then fell apart into normal negative entropy. I'm as mystified as ever and hold *Canticle* in even higher esteem."

Walt was working on a sequel to *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, which may yet be completed. I have no idea what parts of his draft will survive if it is, but in one letter he wrote, "While working on the *Canticle* follow-up novel, I dreamed up something called the Northwest Heresy, which reflected a lot of my own ideas about what Christianity might, or might have, become. Among other things, including a recognition of the divinity of the Virgin, it involved married religious orders with four vows. The fourth vow was this: 'I will follow Jesus Christ as my Lord on earth while I live, and I will refuse to enter heaven afterwards so long as any sinner at all is being tormented in hell; I vow to work unceasingly for the salvation of every child of Adam throughout eternity, though God himself confine me to hell for doing so.'...That's been one trouble with the novel. It keeps getting bogged down in religion, because I do."

He was a complicated, difficult, and compassionate man. I liked him very much. God rest him. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

LIZ McCLOSKEY

MAINTAINING DISTINCTIONS

Assisted suicide erases them

For those of you still wrestling with moral qualms over the notion of physician-assisted suicide, there are those who would calm your concern. Bishop John Shelby Spong of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark has strongly endorsed the report of a diocesan task force which concludes that assisted suicide is now a morally and theologically justifiable choice. A federal appeals court has proclaimed that the Constitution grants a right to assisted suicide. Jack Kevorkian was acquitted of criminal wrongdoing in the deaths of two people who died from breathing carbon monoxide that he supplied.

This kind of support for the practice—from a significant religious body, a high-level court, and a criminal court—means that the lines in this debate are being drawn all too clearly. Assisted suicide is becoming an either-or proposition. But if there is any issue that is best allowed a gray area, this is it.

It is accepted medical practice, considered morally acceptable in major religious traditions, including Catholicism, to provide a dying person in great pain with relief even if the means chosen may hasten death. No physician has been convicted of murder for prescrib-

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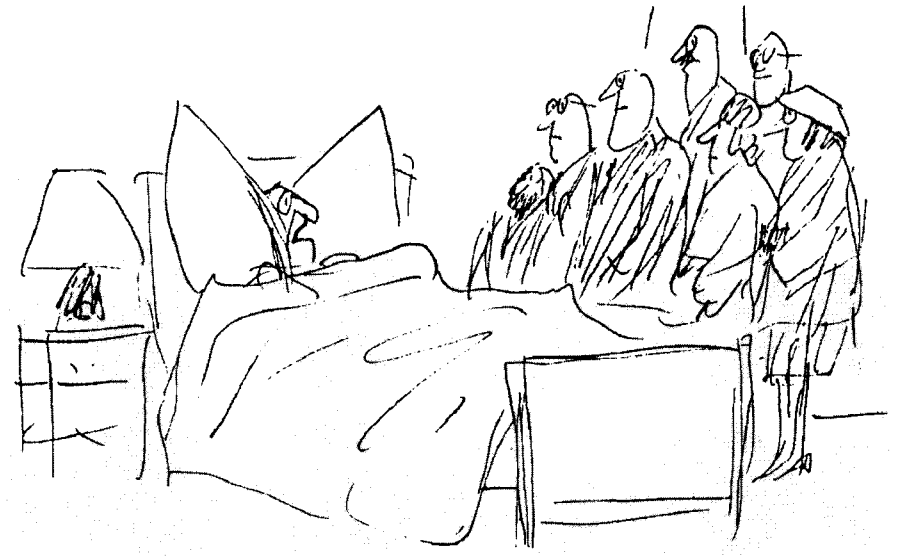
ing or administering such treatment. Acceptance of such relief is labeled suicide only by those at one extreme of the debate, who also consider it suicidal to refuse certain potentially life-prolonging technologies.

But societal near-consensus around relief for dying people has rested on the principle of double effect, meaning that while treatment may shorten the dying process, that is acceptable because the intention is only to relieve pain. The movement to legalize assisted suicide shreds this quiet consensus, thereby jeopardizing the integrity of the medical profession, the dying process, and the social fabric.

Actually, there are two movements involved here. One of them, the "right-to-die" movement, has spurred legislation throughout the country affirming people's right to refuse medical treatment at the end of life. The "right-to-die" movement challenges the technological ethos of the medical profession—the dogma that when something can be done it should be done; instead it insists that medical care must give a central place to patients' wishes, must acknowledge that caring for a patient does not always call for keeping a patient alive as long as possible and by any means necessary. There is still a long way to go in promoting an ethic of medical care that accepts the inevitability of death and provides supportive environments in which to die with dignity, in the company and care of loved ones not afraid to talk and grieve about it. But the growing acknowledgment of the benefits of hospice care by medical professionals attests to progress.

The assisted-suicide movement is trying to ride the coattails of this crusade, thereby spreading confusion. It would give patients ultimate authority to usurp the dying process altogether by calling upon doctors deliberately to end patients' lives. Instead of moving the medical profession toward a caring ethic for dying patients, it would thrust physicians into the role of death-providers, in effect giving them one more option on the menu of technical fixes for the messy reality of death.

The recent statement by the Episcopal Diocese of Newark justified its acceptance of assisted suicide in part by affirming that "death is part of the fabric of life." But facing one's imminent death, rather than an occasion to exercise absolute autonomy, puts one squarely in touch with one's absolute finitude. One can legitimately refuse to be controlled by medical technology, but the very message of death is that we are limited beings. Exalting human autonomy as a rationale for triumphing over death by choosing suicide reflects the grossly exaggerated status of "autonomy," "choice," and "self" in our culture.



"Dying? Goodness no! I asked you here to borrow money."

It is literally overkill for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit to proclaim the existence of a constitutional right to be aided by one's physician in committing suicide" [*see* "Court-assisted suicide," *Commonweal*, March 22]. The court says it is ruling on the narrow issue of whether a terminally ill patient can solicit a doctor's help in hastening a death that is already in process, and asserts: "We believe that most, if not all, doctors would not assist a terminally ill patient to hasten his death as long as there were any reasonable chance of alleviating the patient's suffering or enabling him to live under tolerable conditions." But the court is declaring assisted suicide a liberty interest—an interest that cannot long be limited to the competent, consenting terminally ill person in intractable pain.

Consider, as well, the kind of exploitative pressure that can result from removing any legal barrier to helping people kill themselves. If it is permitted, is it also expected? Isn't this permission *aimed* at those who are feeling burdensome and vulnerable, whose disease frightens and alienates others? What about outright coercion of the elderly, disabled, and others for whom some (including, sadly, relatives) might be all too ready to assist in suicide? Proponents dismiss these concerns, arguing that strict oversight can curb abuses. But given the fact of human frailty, legalizing *and legitimating* assisted suicide will sow suspicion and distrust between the dying and their caregivers, and will provide incentives for hardening our hearts.

The effort to deal with the dying process better than we have been is a good and noble cause. But the push toward sanctioning assisted suicide will only further polarize the public without moving us to consensus on how to care for the dying so that they can die well. The best hope, perhaps a slim one, is that, out of all this, more people may be able to make the crucial distinction not grasped by the authors of the circuit court decision or the Episcopal task force: To provide effective pain relief that may hasten death is not to assist a suicide. If it sounds like a gray area, well it is. But that's okay. □

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Mary Pat Kelly

HOLDING OUT FOR HOPE

Clinton's Irish policy

An unusually quiet Saint Patrick's week in the United States allowed the fragile Irish peace talks to gain ground on American soil. Receiving the Irish-American of the Year Award in New York on March 11, President Bill Clinton described his December trip to Ireland as "the best days of my life." The enthusiastic receptions by friendly crowds in Dublin and Belfast seem to inspire a heartfelt eloquence in the president.

The February 9 bombing in London that ended the IRA cease-fire was expected to dampen annual Saint Patrick's Day festivities. But the president found the right words to turn despair into determination. "We all know," he said, "that we come tonight in a celebration that is not as unambiguous as we might have hoped....Tonight, in the land of our ancestors, the future once again is at a crossroads. And, once again, each of us must do our part to safeguard the promise, the precious promise of peace."

Clinton has already done more than any U.S. president to focus the power of his office on finding a solution for "the troubles." The first sitting chief executive ever to visit Northern Ireland, his interests seem to transcend any domestic political advantage. He said that his concern about "the troubles" began in his days as a student in England. "As an American acutely aware of his Irish roots, I was deeply interested in it and troubled by it."

In the intervening years he had not attended to the conflict. Perhaps he, like so many Americans, found the multitude of parties confusing and the periodic eruption of violence inexplicable. Clinton said that he began seriously to confront Ireland's ancient quarrel three years ago. The political analysis and philosophy of John Hume, whom he calls, "my friend," and the writings of Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney were the vehicles that drew him beyond the media's surface presentation. His December visit to Ireland made this understanding tangible; Heaney's line, "The moment where hope and history rhyme," was virtually the theme of the trip.

At the New York dinner, Clinton called Hume "Ireland's most eloquent spokesman of peace," and challenged Irish-Americans to consider the "journey of the soul" made by both Hume and Heaney—a journey that is "a fight against cynicism and giving up, a fight against the anger and anguish that comes from feeling impotent in the face of larger events."

The alternative to persevering in this journey is clear—a return to violence and division. Indeed, some on the Northern Ireland scene had seemed almost relieved at the end of the cease-fire in February. Among Unionist politicians the sentiment seemed to be, "See, we told you you can't trust the IRA." Voices on the other side said, "See, after seventeen months of peace, the British still have not moved, the Unionists still refuse to talk." But the people turned out in huge peace demonstrations in Belfast and Dublin. The faces that had smiled at Clinton in December, now looked stricken. In the heart of the nationalist Falls Road, a crowd that confronted Sinn Féin leader, Gerry Adams, also cheered a woman who said, "If the politicians don't want to stand and talk to each other about peace, don't give them your votes."

The Unionist leader, David Trimble, attended the American-Ireland dinner in Washington on March 14, something unthinkable a few years ago when most Northern Protestants assumed that Irish-Americans back the IRA. Irish Prime Minister John Bruton, John Hume, and Gerry Adams (a private guest) were also there.

The sense from all quarters is that Irish-Americans must speak with one voice in urging peace. Clinton said that America's gift to Ireland is "unity in diversity." John Hume is his book, *A New Ireland* (Roberts Rinehart), argues, "The real task of politics is to recognize our diversity and our differences and then find ways to respect and accommodate difference." He cited the motto on America's smallest coin, the penny, *E Pluribus Unum*, as the only political philosophy possible in a diverse society.

Such ideas make political commentators on both sides of the Atlantic nervous. It is easier to talk about political deals: the Unionists with their nine parliamentary votes can manipulate British Prime Minister John Major because in the last parliamentary challenge to his government his hold on power depended on only one vote. They use their leverage in trying to wring concessions from him on Northern Ireland. In this country, pundits ask in this election year about the role of Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) in Clinton's Ireland policy. But perhaps the pundits miss the point. Or they miss Clinton's point: "The truth is no one knows whether human nature craves dominance and division over peace and hope, but we all believe we know, and in the believing we can make a new reality....If we believe we are children of God, then what is important is what we are, not what we are not. And that is the gift that Irish-Americans must give Ireland in our lifetime."

In the meantime, in an attempt to work for another cease-fire, the British and Irish governments have announced that all-party talks will begin on June 10. Elections for representatives to the talks will be held in late May in Northern Ireland. Maneuvering on the ground rules for these elections is now going on. But the date seems auspicious. June 9 is the feast of Saint Colmcille, or Columba, the princely monk for whom both the main Catholic and Protestant churches in Derry are named. Unity in diversity—let's hope. □

Mary Pat Kelly *is the author of the forthcoming* Good to Go: The Rescue of Scott O'Grady from Bosnia *(Naval Institute Press).*

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CAN UNIVERSITIES BE CATHOLIC?

Some reflections, comments, worries & suggestions

Robert J. Egan

Questions about the Catholic identity of a university—or anything else—are questions about its distinctive features as Catholic. A university is said to be Catholic as a way of distinguishing its from something else—something other than Catholic. The available otherness will shape the way identity is understood.

When universities emerged in the Middle Ages, no one would have thought of calling them "Catholic," since no alternative possibilities were really in play. It is only some centuries later, in a situation of religious and cultural pluralism, as in the United States, that an explicitly and distinctively Catholic university becomes a possibility.

At first these were alternative institutions mainly or exclusively for Catholic use. Their Catholic character as institutions was in no way problematic; it was a corollary of the religious affiliation of their faculties, administrators, and student bodies. As this situation has changed, especially over the last few decades, the idea of a Catholic university has become more complex and the appropriate preservation of its distinctive identity more of a challenge.

It is my experience that when faculty and professional staff gather to talk about the Catholic character of their university, the complexity and urgency of the question will often be denied. Some will see no difficulties maintaining the Catholic character of the university, announcing themselves contented with the way things are; others will predictably announce with big smiles, as if they had just thought up the phrase, that "'Catholic university' is a contradiction in terms." Many will feel that enough has been said if they can manage to pronounce the words: "I have no problem with the mission statement," though not having-a-problem with the mission of an institution is not usually thought to be the ideal attitude among persons chosen to work within it. Administrators will sometimes worry that overemphasizing the Catholic character of the university will offend some benefactors, board members, faculty members, or government agencies; while underplaying it, of course, might discourage some parents and alumni. Some faculty members cannot hear the word "Catholic" without responding with the words "sectarian," "proselytizing," and "indoctrination."

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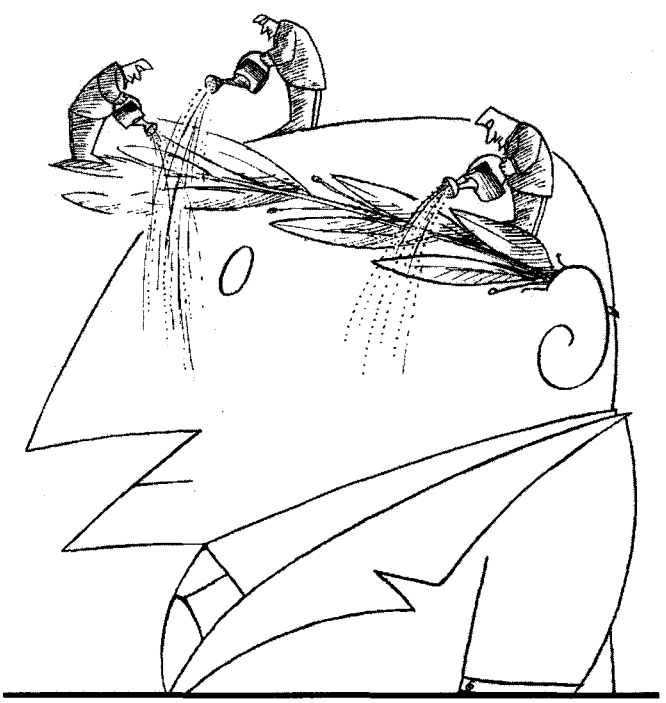
For many people—some for it and some against it—the very heart of what is meant by the word "Catholic" has something to do with restrictions on one's freedom, as if the authentic catholicity of a university should be measured by what speech, what convictions, what kinds of gatherings it forcibly excludes. For others, the word "Catholic" will feel like something old-fashioned, obsolete, superstitious, legalistic, prudish, exclusive, or authoritarian. Although, for me, the word "Catholic" means redemptive, liberating, inclusive, reconciling, life-affirming, and reverent toward human reason and human longing and human culture, I realize that the above-named concerns and anxieties are by no means groundless. An arbitrary, obscurantist, and oppressive way of exercising authority within the Catholic church has been—and, alas, sometimes continues to be—grounds for a very reasonable kind of concern and anxiety.

In the background of these kinds of conversations is the fact that there have been dramatic changes during the last half-century, both in the basic characteristics and self-understanding of American universities and in the basic characteristics and self-understanding of Roman Catholicism. As a result, there are many different ways of thinking and



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talking about university life and Catholic faith represented on any large campus. We bring different personal histories, different experiences, different memories and hopes to all our deliberations on religion, higher education, curriculum planning, procedures for hiring and promotion, student recruitment, service learning, student-life policy, and civic responsibility.

This being so, all efforts to talk about the subject should begin by acknowledging its complexity; no single analysis of the situation, no single solution to the problem, is likely to be adequate. The fact is that what was once obvious, and could more or less be taken for granted, or entrusted to the care of special groups on campus—for example, the founding religious community—must now be made more explicit, and elaborated more fully, and become the informed concern of all the members of the faculty, professional staff, administration, and governing boards. This is going to be hard.

All efforts to talk about Catholic identity should begin by acknowledging its complexity; no single analysis of the situation, no single solution to the problem, is likely to be adequate.

In my opinion, the greatest difficulties we face in thinking and talking about these issues are being caused by philosophical problems. And the most important philosophical questions we can ask are always those about the philosophy or philosophies that we are always already practicing. The source of much of the perplexity we face in reflecting on the idea of a Catholic university is the assumptions—or ranges of assumptions—that we bring to our work at universities that are shaped by philosophical attitudes or convictions that might be described as "modern" or "liberal."

Many of these perplexities are caused by the belief that we do not, in fact, inhabit any philosophical convictions, that it is therefore possible to leave this thing called "philosophy" to some others and to build our mutual self-understanding as scholars and educators on the basis of something else, something more obvious, or maybe even more objective. This notion that there are escape routes from philosophy, in fact, is one of the chief characteristics of the philosophy I am trying to describe.

Another characteristic of this philosophy is the belief that we ourselves do not stand in a tradition, but have a place on which to stand that lies outside of all traditions, from which place we can be critical of tradition as such. This confidence that there is an escape route from tradition is a second big problem. Thus we all live within a tradition of being against tradition, a tradition which therefore is systematically forgetful of its own history and systematically negligent of the conditions of possibility for its own survival.

A third characteristic of this philosophy is that its model for valid knowledge is a certain popular understanding of the procedures of the physical and life sciences and its belief that all scholarly disciplines should, as much as possible, approximate the methods and attitudes of these sciences. This view of serious knowing, when simplified and over-generalized, sometimes produces a view of the truth, as Bernard Lonergan once said, so objective that it doesn't require minds to think it. This objectivism, in turn, distracts attention from a disciplined exploration of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in knowledge and from the role played by feeling and imagination and practice and social location in human knowing. So thought is cut off from love, and facts are cut off from values, and theories are cut off from practices, and observing selves are cut off from the realm of responsible agency. And subjectivity is cut off from objectivity. These are part of the legacy of this philosophy.

A fourth characteristic of this philosophy is that it is individualistic, it tends to think of human life in terms of the decontextualized self. The inherently social character of human consciousness and the relational nature of selfhood itself are overlooked. The fact that language is necessarily interpersonal or that the search for truth is somehow always dialogical is repressed. The fact that the phenomenon of meaning itself can only be understood in connection with traditions of communal practices is obscured. Societies are therefore thought of as contractual relationships established by free-floating individuals for their own purposes; and we become inarticulate about all those things which Charles Taylor calls "irreducibly social goods."

In this framework, concerns about the good and the beautiful tend to be relegated to the realm of the merely subjective, of irrational and undiscussable preferences, urges, or tastes. The only choice is between Objectivism and Relativism. Art, literature, morality, and even politics drift toward this zone of essentially "emotive," noncognitive expressive values. Except for some professionalized, technical, and detailed aspects of the field, much of philosophy drifts this way too. And so, obviously, does the whole subject of religion.

For people who adhere to this philosophy, while probably denying that they adhere to any philosophy, there are no sensible, serious, objective, publicly meaningful ways of talking about religious beliefs or the meaning of religious practices, which whole subject is therefore better left to the private sphere. Many of these people no longer believe that it is really possible to be intelligent and honest and religious at the same time.

Now in a situation where philosophy, tradition, knowledge, community, and religion are being thought of in this way, it truly does become difficult to think through "the idea of a Catholic university." Some time ago, it became difficult to think through the idea of a Protestant university, and the shimmer of the false universality of modern liberalism—of being a tradition

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which is no tradition and having a vantage point which is the view from nowhere in particular and having as one's chief value the ideal of value-free inquiry—is part of the story of the somewhat well-intentioned, somewhat unintentional secularization of institutions like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton.

I'd like to say that I am neither for nor against this whole, complicated thing that might be called "modernity" or "liberalism," which has, in fact, many different currents and many good qualities as well as bad. But I am in favor of a critical, reflective, and discerning attitude toward it, trying to figure out which things we want to treasure and preserve and which things we want to question and resist. I confess I have some sympathies toward words like "hermeneutics," and "communitarian," and even "postmodern," provided, of course, that they're properly understood! In any case, I think we are facing a new opportunity to think in fresh ways about these issues. I believe that helpful resources are accumulating in philosophy, social science, and the humanities—in the natural sciences too—and even, if I may say so, in theology, that could help us enormously in advancing this conversation if we wanted to make use of them.

These philosophical questions and answers affect the way we think about education, and about what a university is, and about what it might be for, and so about how we are to determine concretely what should be meant in this context by "excellence." They affect the way we think about our options in the face of certain cultural trends, market forces, and government policies, and the way we make decisions about them—the way we become more conscious, more thoughtful, more intentional in relation to them.

These philosophical questions and answers also affect our theologies, our ways of thinking about the meaning, relevance, value, and truth of religious teachings and practices. And so they will help determine the way we answer the question: What is meant by "Catholic"?—whether a "Catholic" university or a "Catholic" anything else.

I want to resist a little the initial assumption that being Catholic means mainly being willing to subscribe to a long list of propositions making truth-claims about something. Being Catholic means belonging to a tradition, being related to a religious community, that is characterized by certain practices, stories, symbols, and beliefs.

And a tradition is not a bunch of people all saying exactly the same thing while talking to no one in particular. It is a community living in history, interpreting its past and present circumstance and future possibilities in the light of certain memories, texts, hopes, and ways of proceeding. It is different people with different perspectives talking with one another about the things they cherish, as well as talking with people representing alternative traditions.

Furthermore, as Alasdair MacIntyre has pointed out in *After Virtue*, "when a tradition is in good order it is partially constituted by an argument about the goods the pursuit of which gives that tradition its particular point and purpose." He goes on to say: "So when an institution—a university, say, or a farm, or a hospital—is the bearer of a tradition of practice

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or practices, its common life will be partly, but in a centrally important way, constituted by a continuous argument as to what a university is and ought to be or what good farming is or what good medicine is....A living tradition then is a historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition."

This seems to me to be true not only about a university, then, but about Catholicism as well.

So what is a Catholic university? How should we imagine its meaning more concretely? A Catholic university, it seems to me, will be a place where a significant number of its faculty and professional staff and of its student body are Catholics and people well-disposed toward Catholicism. It will be a place where being Catholic is taken seriously by most faculty and staff as an intelligent and morally responsible option for contemporary people.

A Catholic university will be a place where being Catholic is taken seriously as an intelligent and morally responsible option for contemporary people.

It will be a place where people are cultivating a distinctive ethos, shaped by distinctive practices and memories and concerns. And this ethos will be reflected in hiring and recruitment policies, in curriculum planning, in available student-support services and extracurricular activities, in the physical features of the campus, and possibly in special academic centers and programs. Saying this leaves a lot of questions unanswered, I realize, and different universities will work out the details in different ways; but some acknowledgment of these basic features seems sensible to me.

A Catholic university should be a place in which the cultivation of a particular ethos is taking place, an ethos which involves, for example, compassion, humility, honesty, gratitude, critical reflection, spiritual discernment, a love of learning, and a generous concern for people who are suffering, or poor, or oppressed, or excluded—a place where faith, hope, and an intelligent love are somehow operative and discussable. It should be a place where many dedicated scholars and intellectuals share the conviction: that it matters what we invest our hearts in, what we give our hearts to, what we set our hearts on; that a search for truth cannot be separated from issues like friendship, and community life, and a love of virtue; and that self-fulfillment might inherently entail a concern for the common good, a hungering and thirsting for justice, and a search for a transcendent truth and goodness and beauty.

A Catholic university would be distinguished by its tradition of practices, including its characteristic worries, and narratives, and daily and seasonal celebrations. One of these practices will be a search for the essential, an inquiry about the heart of the matter, a conversation about the meaning of being Catholic in a particular culture and in a particular age. Creeds and other formulas of faith will play a role here, as will the appropriate, just, and prudent exercise of various kinds of authority; customs, prayers, and liturgies will play a role, and so will conversations, conferences, and arguments. Hand-out sheets and oaths will probably not be so helpful. What seems most important is that the question about the essential be the focus of particular practices.

What is needed, I want to say, are particular practices—inquiries, gatherings, arguments, and celebrations—that could remind us of some history, focus our attention, and cultivate particular habits of mind and heart that hold together our concerns for truth, for goodness, for justice, for beauty, for peace, for critical intelligence, for freedom and responsibility, for research and careful scholarship, for friendship and conviviality.

My own sense is that the future of Catholic universities will depend a lot on border crossings—the French might say "on transgressing boundaries"—but I would rather say, on border crossings: between our individual offices, between our different disciplines and departments, between our various schools and programs, as well as between knowledge and love, between theory and practice, between the local and the global, between the mystical and the prophetic. The irreducibly social good of a Catholic university will be available to us only insofar as we recognize our interconnectedness in new ways and revitalize our search for more coherent and integrated ways of thinking and teaching—and *living*. □

Peter Warshaw

Give Yourself to Poetry

Dear child, yes, give yourself
to poetry and leave the world
of unsubstantial things. No need
to wear that pretty ribbon now
your hair will have no place to go.
Withered friends will share your tea
on afternoons, imaginary
voices close at hand whose pale
company respect the solitude
a poet's heart requires. Good life,
dear one, and fortune bring to you
moments of lucidity
to round the granite hours of your day.

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JOB WANTED

Catholic colleges & the hiring dilemma

Thomas N. Maloney

In the fall of 1994, I reached a milestone of sorts. After a long job search, I landed my first tenure-track academic post. I found myself reflecting on the process, beginning with the essay I wrote in my last year of college to accompany my graduate school applications. A professor I consulted looked over my first draft and recommended a rewrite: As it stood, he said, what I had to say about my goals and interests sounded too narrowly Catholic.

It was realistic advice: Why talk Greek to people who speak nothing but Latin? I took it, and it seemed to work, which is to say that my applications drew fellowship offers from some good schools. Still, what the original version of the essay said about the interface between my Catholicism and my approach to academic work was important. I wanted to be an academic economist because I wanted to think, teach, and write about issues like poverty and discrimination; more broadly, to deal with real-world problems in the light of Catholic faith, as a means of following Christ.

As I completed my dissertation and began looking for a job, it was natural for me to want a post at a Catholic university. My undergraduate years at a Catholic college offered the opportunity to develop an integrated, holistic, and critical vision of the world, in a way that my graduate work at a large state school did not. Parish life during my graduate years was enriching, but I wanted work in a university community that would provide a more explicit connection between my work and my faith.

As it happened, my job search came at a time when there seemed to be a renewal of interest in and concern about the quality of Catholic higher education. I followed the discussion in *Commonweal*, *America*, and elsewhere, and I attended the first Collegium Summer Institute on Faith and Intellectual Life (an effort by Catholic colleges to develop faculty who will enrich the Catholic intellectual tradition at their institutions). Interesting stuff, even inspiring; but I found that things looked rather different in the trenches—that is, at the interview table, where the thorny issues of faculty recruitment by Catholic colleges and universities get played out. Ultimately, I accepted a position not at a Catholic school but at a state university.

Because the academic job market was weak in the period of my job search, I didn't apply only to Catholic institutions, and in fact applied for any post that seemed even remotely related to my fields of expertise. Still, I focused strongly on Catholic colleges and universities, stressing always that I sought them out precisely because they were Catholic. That didn't seem to ring any bells; in later contacts, I found that my interest in Catholic higher education was of no great interest to the faculty recruiters with whom I was talking. Most schools mentioned their religious affiliation in their job postings but never again during the recruiting process. Friends who interviewed with Catholic institutions had similar experiences. One of them was told by an interviewer from a Catholic university that the religious affiliation of the university need have no effect on the experience of working there. No recruiters from Catholic schools said this to me personally, but one interviewer at a Protestant school said essentially the same thing.

Since there isn't much agreement, in general or on partic-

Thomas N. Maloney *is an assistant professor in the department of economics at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City.*

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The Protestant Precedent

So far as the future is concerned, the most crucial area where these issues [of diversity] play themselves out is in faculty hiring. Once a church-related institution adopts the policy that it will hire simply "the best qualified candidates," it is simply a matter of time until its faculty will have an ideological profile essentially like that of the faculty at every other mainstream university. The first loyalties of faculty members will be to the national cultures of the professions rather than to any local or ecclesiastical traditions. Faculty members become essentially interchangeable parts in a standardized national system. At first, when schools move in the direction of open hiring, they can count on some continuity with their traditions based on informal ties and self-selection of those congenial to their heritage. Within a generation, however, there is bound to be a shift to a majority for whom national professional loyalties are primary. Since departmental faculties typically have virtual autonomy in hiring, it becomes impossible to reverse the trend and the church tradition becomes vestigial. The Protestant experience thus suggests that once a school begins to move away from the religious heritage as a factor in hiring, the pressures become increasingly greater to continue to move in that direction.

Such a conclusion becomes particularly perplexing if one weighs it against the good reasons that schools may have for increasing faculty diversity. Some of the stricter religious schools may exclude valuable faculty perspectives or they may unduly inhibit academic freedom and creative scholarship. Or a strong case might be made that they would better fulfill their Christian missions by serving broader constituencies. Yet, despite the merits of these concerns, both the historical precedents and analysis of the forces that drive historical change suggest that opening the doors for such valuable and refreshing breezes soon lets in gale-force winds that drive out the religious heritage altogether. GEORGE MARSDEN

From "What Can Catholic Universities Learn from Protestant Examples?" in The Challenge and Promise of a Catholic University, *ed. Theodore M. Hesburgh (University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).*

ular campuses, about what "Catholic identity" means or ought to mean in higher education, I suppose it isn't surprising that members of recruiting committees devote little or no time to the topic. Even if some degree of consensus existed, recruiters would face the task of describing that vision while also making clear that they were interested in non-Catholic as well as Catholic applicants: not an easily achieved balance. Moreover, there will always be job candidates who will expect an institution's religious affiliation to be only a burden and a limitation. But if my experience was typical, the current assumption seems to be that all candidates feel that way.

By way of qualification, I should note that in most of my contacts with Catholic institutions I didn't get very far into the process; it could be that the Catholic identity of the schools came to play a greater role as the pool of candidates was narrowed. I should also note that, having been on the job market twice (once before and once after taking a post-doctoral position), I have seen indications that administrators and hiring committees are becoming more open in discussing the Catholic vision of their schools with job candidates. Some schools now send prospective candidates mission statements describing what the Catholic character of the schools might mean for a faculty member. Some also now ask candidates, even in their initial cover letters, how their work would complement the Catholic character of the school.

Good question: Given my original preference for working on a Catholic campus, why am I now at a state school? Certainly, the lack of a good match between my expertise and the needs of most of the Catholic schools I contacted played a large role (or so the rejection letters said). But I did not choose my current position simply by default. Rather, I have come to believe that certain core values that can be present in academic departments in all types of schools can be more important than church affiliation. These values relate both to what we study and teach and to how we study and teach.

First, concern for the conditions faced by real people should be at the center of one's teaching and research. Much currently published work in my field, economics, has more to do with displaying a set of technical skills than with investigating, let alone improving, the conditions of people's lives. Many economists of all types, but particularly those who want to connect our work with our moral and religious values, find this frustrating. Of course, focusing on technical issues or other hot topics unrelated to social needs and ethical standards may be a more direct route to fame (and grants, and tenure). But, as Brian Daley argued in his talk at Collegium's first symposium (*America*, September 11, 1993), Catholic intellectual life should not be driven by a yearning for fame and prestige but should mirror Christ's attitude of self-effacing service, even if this means pursuing topics other than those in favor with the current hot shots in the profession. It is easier to work on what is in fashion, better to focus on work that may help people. Sometimes the two can be combined, but sometimes not.

Second, academic work should be marked by openness to a variety of views, to a broad and respectful discourse. Catholic social thought, to my mind, does not champion a

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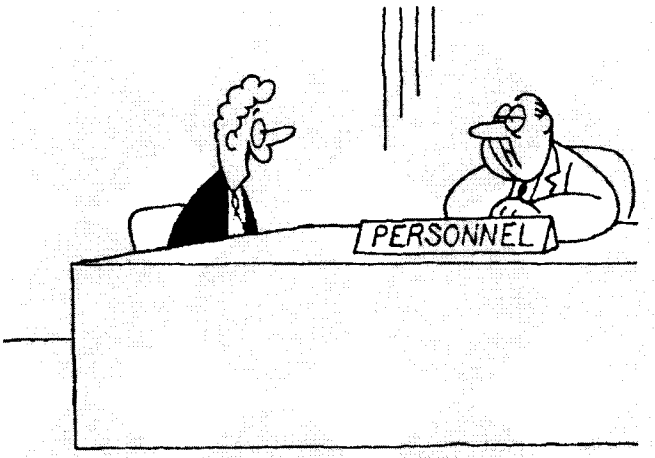
particular economic system or set of policies but rather stresses a primary commitment to treating human beings with dignity. Toward that end, it encourages us to listen seriously to a broad range of ideas. This value of openness is not really that common in universities these days. Anyone who has spent time in academic seminars knows that the debate is often unfriendly-to-hostile, marked by sneering and one-upsmanship rather than by respectful disagreement. Catholic intellectual life should be characterized by mutual respect and open dialogue across schools of thought.

Through the recruiting process, it became clear to me that these core values (though, of course, without the specific religious emphasis I have given them) are present in my new department to a greater degree than in most others. That means I can continue to view and carry out my work as a vocation.

There will be limitations. Working on a Catholic campus, I could more easily develop course material and programs explicitly connected to Catholic social thought and the moral dimensions of the economy. I could more openly encourage students to make their own connections between faith and their academic work. And I will continue to miss the kind of unifying vision that I found as an undergraduate at a Catholic school.

Nevertheless, I believe that my desire for an academic career connected to my most basic beliefs and values has been realized, at least in significant measure. The very process of searching for a job has taught me a lot about how to make that connection effectively. Along the way I found that there are many young academics, currently looking for their first tenure-track positions, who want that same kind of integration. I hope that faculty and administration at Catholic schools will bring more open discussion of Catholic intellectual life into the faculty recruiting process in the future. Perhaps to their surprise, they will find a group of candidates who are eager and receptive. □



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Timothy P. Schilling

NOTES TO A STUDENT

Education for parish ministry

At times the preparation I underwent to become a pastoral assistant seemed endless. For ten years I felt myself to be in the possession of skills that would allow me to go out and make a difference. So why not, I asked myself, just go out and do it?

Those now working in some parish ministry, or contemplating that possibility, can give at least one reason why just jumping out there does not work. Increasingly, parish ministries are becoming professionalized. So diving into the job market without credentials or some form of certification can leave you with limited opportunities. Basically, you can work in the places where they cannot find anyone else. (And one of the reasons these places can't find anyone is that they can't afford to pay a decent salary.)

I have mixed feelings about the reality of the professionalization of ministries in our church. On the one hand, I knew as a young college graduate that the faith I had, along with experience gained from summer camps, probably made me capable of doing decent work in youth ministry.

On the other hand, now that I am working full-time for a parish as the youth and young-adult minister and director of communications, I can see how much going back to school benefited me. But not just school: worldly experience in general. I can see now that every class taken, every volunteer assignment entered into, and every hour spent in self-examination has contributed to my ability to do my job now. I have no regrets about the years I spent tuning my engine. Nor do I resent the debts that piled up along the way.

My own work of discernment and preparation for ministry took me through the priestly formation program of the Archdiocese of Seattle, through a lay ministry training program called Channel (*see* box), through four years of graduate school theology, and two years of waiting on tables.

The work that I now do in many ways seems easy to me.

Channel—ing

Channel is a ministry training program in Seattle, Washington, that gives young adults, most of whom are just out of college, their first exposure to church ministry and theological study. Participants make a one- or two-year commitment and the program hopes to promote personal, professional, and spiritual growth.

The Channel year begins in the summer with a month-long period of intensive training. Channel participants then take job assignments in Western Washington: some are parish ministers, some are Catholic school teachers, some work for social-service agencies. The program provides ongoing support and supervision. Theological education is part of the summer training and of the monthly group meetings. Most Channel members live in small communities of two to eight people.

I participated in the Channel program for one year, 1987–88. I have kept in touch with the program leadership and membership and recently I had the opportunity to join the present group for one of its weekend events.

Honora Nolty, O.P., one of the program coordinators, described the program. "I wish my own formation did as intentional a work of formation as Channel does," she said. "We hothouse things in Channel in order to deal with issues [participants] would normally deal with later. Some of the things they are dealing with I didn't come to until mid-life. For example, how family of origin affects one's ministry."

Tom Lucking, twenty-nine, a Channel participant working as a youth minister in Bothell, Washington, joined Channel after working for Microsoft. "I saw this as a doorway to ministry. For me it has been a way to get a job without having had professional experience," Lucking said. He would like to see the program go into deeper waters concerning spirituality and community. "In our community, you assume people are going to pursue Catholicism and its belief. But this is not always true and it comes as a surprise. But we did come to the point where we discussed it."

Terese DeGon, twenty-six, studied world religions at the University of Arizona before coming to Channel. "I came wanting to be a teacher, but I'm not sure I want a teacher's schedule," she said. "My dream is to be an adult educator in the church. I hope in some way to help people get excited about their faith."

I asked Alicia Bondanella, twenty-two, a recent graduate of the University of San Francisco and now a youth minister, if Channel has been what she expected. "It's been more intense. It's opened me up to different experiences." Had it changed her view of the church? "Not changed, but broadened."

Channel is one place where a young person interested in ministry can try on the work for size.

T.P.S.

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Interesting and challenging, definitely. But not as hard as staying up until 4:00 A.M. to finish a theology paper. Or trying to figure out, alone or with university friends, what life is all about. Or explaining to an unhappy customer in the restaurant why he's had to wait thirty minutes to get his Eggs Benedict.

Now I see how valuable it was for me to study Greek and Latin, though I rarely apply this knowledge in any direct way. Disciplines that seem irrelevant (Why must we trace the entire history of this moral debate?) have a way of broadening a person and sharpening his or her readiness to meet unforeseen challenges. Facts that are quickly forgotten have a way of sticking around on some level of consciousness, acting as an influence even when we can't perfectly reproduce the quote or theorem. I know when something does not sound right, even if I cannot tell you immediately where the problem lies. But give me some time. I know where to look if I can't come up with an answer myself.

Years of study have taught me patience and have also shown me that immediate experience is not the whole of reality. A fetid pool proves to be full of life. Inactivity shows itself to be the necessary precondition for change. A university, as the name suggests, should give us a large and varied perspective on reality.

But, of course, degrees will not prepare you for everything. My academic training, which included courses on counseling, did not give me magical words to use when a young woman showed up at the parish one afternoon threatening to kill herself. Because of the time of day, I was the one asked to be with her. I called on every bit of education, life experience, and wisdom I had. It was not enough. They found her dead at home the next day.

I try to be realistic about what I can and cannot do. The littlest efforts make a positive difference: saying good-morning, sending someone a thank-you card or an article, letting people know about the clean-up project down at the shelter, putting on a good lesson. But I cannot change the whole church or the world, or the fact that people die when they seemingly shouldn't.

All those years preparing myself have contributed to this realism and have contributed to my ability to step back and reflect on what is happening. So to impatient young people intent on a career in ministry I bring two observations. First: it is tremendously satisfactory work, even with the heartbreak and pain it sometimes exposes you to. And second: relax. Enjoy the winding road. Travel. Get a job serving expresso or volunteer in the national park. Keep a journal. Consider other careers and try one on. And get as much formal education as you can stomach. Not only will it give you richer career opportunities; it will also make you a better minister, whether you are serving in a parish in Port Townsend, Washington, or in the chancery of the Archdiocese of New York. □

Timothy P. Schilling *works as a pastoral assistant at Saint Joseph's Parish in Vancouver, Washington.*

Gerald J. Russello

CHRISTOPHER DAWSON

Is there a Christian culture?

Nineteen-ninety-five marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of the Catholic historian Christopher Dawson, author of such influential works as *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (1948) and *Progress and Religion* (1929). Sadly, the anniversary and Dawson's legacy were little noted.

Dawson was born in 1889 at Hay Castle, on the border between Wales and England. Most of his early life was spent at Hartlington in Yorksire, the location of the Dawson family home. Educated at Winchester and Trinity College, Oxford, he never received a doctorate, preferring instead to engage in an extended period of private study. In 1914, with his boyhood friend E.I. Watkin as sponsor, Dawson was received into the Catholic church.

In England, Dawson published in both sociological journals and popular newspapers, and he attracted the attention of such admirers as T.S. Eliot. His fame in America was enhanced by lectures he gave throughout the United States during the early 1960s while serving as the first Charles Chauncey

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Stillman Chair in Roman Catholic Studies at Harvard University. The last of the amateur historians, Dawson wrote in crisp prose uncluttered with excessive footnotes or jargon, and he relied on his own private library to conduct his research.

This independent course of study allowed reflection across traditional disciplinary boundaries. His first book, *The Age of the Gods* (1928), written when Dawson was almost forty, dealt with European pre-history. Subsequent years saw books and essays on the Oxford movement, Saint Augustine, the Dark Ages, and the magisterial *Progress and Religion*, a penetrating work of intellectual history. Dawson was as comfortable with the history of Islamic Spain or the Byzantine Empire as he was with that of Europe. Indeed, his writing can serve as a model for honest engagement with the ideals of cultures not our own.

Culture begins with cult, Dawson maintained, and it is religious faith that transforms a collection of individuals and social forms into a living culture. Every one of the great world civilizations has been inspired by a religious impulse and shaped by religious practice. Religion is the key to cultural unity and therefore to true material and spiritual progress. Dawson's great work was to demonstrate that the West was no different from any other culture, despite its grand scientific achievements and belief in an ahistorical and secularized "Progress." The distinctive feature of the West has been its attempt to separate itself from the religious roots that had provided moral unity to the European peoples. This movement away from religion was unprecedented in the history of the world, Dawson thought, and represented a profound shift in the pattern of human existence.

This enforced separation between religion and culture Dawson saw as an ultimately fatal misjudgment. Echoing Eliot, Dawson believed that if Europe would not have classical learning or Christian faith, she would have Hitler or Stalin. Without an acknowledgment of the Christian roots of the Western world, the cultural achievements will wither away for lack of foundation. Rejection of Christianity as an animating principle has also, in a seeming paradox, made Westerners less tolerant and understanding of other cultures. "The more we underestimate the religious element in our own culture the less we shall appreciate the cultures of the

Dawson Up Close

Had it not ended earlier, one would like to be able to say that the death of Christopher Dawson, on May 25 [1970] in his eightieth year, marked the end of an era. But the long period of fascination with the idea of a Christian culture came to a close at least a decade ago. Christopher Dawson published little after his retirement from Harvard in 1962, and when he stopped writing there were none to carry on. Perhaps it was all a dream anyway, the notion that Western culture could remain Christian, somehow passing through the crisis of pluralism and secularity. The present evidence suggests that Christianity long ago gave up hope, contenting itself instead with a so-far fruitless quest to find a way to live with a culture not of its making, its glories behind it. It is a long way from Chartres to T-groups.

Though I was Christopher Dawson's assistant for three years at Harvard, his work did not make an immediate impression on me. I appreciated the history he taught me, as did his students, and I came to a fresh understanding of the role of Christianity in forming Western culture. But for me—child of the times—the new theologies of secularity, conciliar renewal, "relevance," and free-wheeling pluralism were far more attractive. While it was never fair to say that Dawson yearned for a return to the Middle Ages, he did dislike the twentieth century; it was alien to the life he knew best, that of an English country scholar born and raised during the reign of Queen Victoria. He once told my wife, quite seriously, that "the world came to an end when the Queen died." All of this was too much for a liberated Irish-Catholic graduate student feasting on the riches of a Harvard as fashionably up-to-date as it was secular.

That was my mistake, or half a mistake at least. It was true that Dawson wanted to hold onto a Christian culture, and that still exerts little pull. But more fundamentally the whole point of his life's work was to show that in one form or another every culture needs a religious basis, some way in which it relates its civic and political life to powers and values which transcend its daily life. We have tried in the West to do away with that kind of a foundation for society. Every man has become his own culture, joined to his fellows by common tastes and passions, superintended by an increasingly desiccated lust for the "human," that great term supposedly able to supply us with all our values and undergird all our institutions. Dawson knew that would never be enough. I'm afraid we are finding out the hard way he was right. I hope some will take the trouble to read him again and see why.

DANIEL CALLAHAN

Daniel Callahan is the president of the Hastings Center. This article appeared in Commonweal, *June 6, 1970.*

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"I rue the day that he saw 'Roots.'"

non-European world," Dawson wrote.

Christian culture is at root a culture of hope, for the future and for all time, Dawson reminds us. Despite occasional gloominess—"it is the sign of the dollar rather than the cross that now marshals the forces of Western civilization," he wrote in 1960—Dawson on the whole saw the present century as one of possibility for Christianity. Dawson compared the modern age to early Christianity, a time when the new faith exploded onto an overcivilized and jaded pagan world and transformed it by bringing a new spiritual dimension to its existence. The secular world may react with scorn or rage, but the Christian must hold fast: what Dawson called the "royal road of Christian progress" ends at Golgotha and the empty tomb, not the corporate board room or state house.

The task for Christians today is to communicate hope to a world "in which man finds himself alone before the monstrous forces which have been created by man to serve his own ends but which have now escaped from his control and threaten to destroy him."

Education was the means by which Dawson sought to effect such a new evangelization. Secular control of the schools and mandatory education concerned him, if only because the modern state does not recognize spiritual values, and public education would always be in some manner deficient. There were disagreements with the Catholic educational authorities as well. Dawson's ideas about the role of education were received with some skepticism by the Catholic educational establishment. Catholic pedagogy at the college level was traditionally weighted heavily in favor of philosophy and theology, and did not allow history and the other social sciences as large a place as Dawson thought they deserved. Dawson wrote a handful of articles on education for *Commonweal* in the 1950s, elaborating his thesis in *The Crisis of Western Education* (1961). He advocated a comprehensive course of study in Christian culture, which would encompass the entirety of Christian life as it has been lived through the centuries: art and architecture, music, poetry and drama, philosophy and history. This new Christian curriculum would be for our time what the deep study of the ancient world was for past centuries.

In his own day, Dawson was active in ecumenical projects, decades before they were encouraged. He was not blind to the failings of Christian culture or the crimes committed in its name. Indeed, it may have been Dawson's readiness to place the entire historical record in full view that retarded his reception in some Catholic intellectual circles, both in his lifetime and after his death. Nevertheless, Dawson was convinced that the ideals that have driven the West for almost two millennia were worth preserving and represent a true source of hope for humanity. □

Gerald J. Russello *is editing a volume of Christopher Dawson's writings.*

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Richard Alleva

FATAL ATTRACTIONS

'Mary Reilly' & 'Before & After'

Mary Reilly is a haunting, fascinating failure. It tells the Jekyll-Hyde yarn from the point-of-view of the doctor's Irish maid (a nonentity in Robert Louis Stevenson's novel). Already infatuated with her employer, the heroine falls for his monstrous alter ego once she discovers that the two men are one. The script, by Christopher Hampton from Valerie Martin's novel, comprises two psychological actions. First, Mary connects Hyde's sexual violence with the childhood rapes inflicted on her by her father. Rather than increasing her revulsion from Hyde, the association leads her into a masochistic fascination with the criminal (She even shields him from the police.) Second, Hyde, homicidal toward everyone else, comes to feel such compassion, even love, for Mary that he not only spares her but kills himself (and, of course, Jekyll) rather than continue to pose a threat to her.

Mary's strange love is clearly articulated by the intercutting of the maid's current experiences with her memories and fantasies, but Hampton doesn't pursue the implications of the obsession. At the movie's conclusion, we know that Mary has been through an emotional journey, but where has it taken her? That is, what is she about to become? An inveterate masochist ready for future demon lovers? A strengthened woman who has gotten masochism out of her system by suffering through it to the point of catharsis? Or is it possible that Mary will become a sadist herself, having absorbed Hyde's nature into her own? In regard to this last possibility, it's worth noting that when Jekyll expires, Mary lies down beside his corpse, but, when she rises, she sees that the doctor's features have turned into Hyde's, and so it is the monster of whom she takes her final, wistful leave.

The second action, Hyde's growing love for Mary, is an ingenious notion rather than a truly believable transformation. "Evil loves innocence," the ad for this movie tells us. Well, maybe, but the concept needs a little more justification than it gets here. Julia Roberts's acceptable performance and lovely face convey muted tendernesss and fear, but why would such qualities give Hyde pause? True to the Stevenson original, this beast kicks a child in the stomach merely because the urchin wandered into his path. So why wouldn't he have the guts of the childlike Mary for garters? What we needed to see in the heroine was an angelic strength that might challenge a demon, and that's not forthcoming from either the script or Roberts.

Another problem: John Malkovich's performance is a blot on this otherwise well-acted movie. As Jekyll, he is made to look as debonair as Ronald Colman, but his speech alternates between pedantry and mush. (And he doesn't even attempt an English accent.) As Hyde, Malkovich looks readier to smoke a joint than commit homicide and has neither magnetism nor ferocity nor even a hint of Faustian hubris.

But though dramatically and psychologically frustrating, *Mary Reilly* is a sensual triumph. Its director, Stephen Frears, his great cinematographer, Philippe Rousselot, and their designers and technicians have created a late Victorian London (impersonated by Edinburgh) worthy of Sickert and Whistler, a world of blue air and gray fog against which the red paint on a transom window sings out like a cry of agony. Jekyll's house is a sumptious cave velveted with shadows, redolent of both Victorian rectitude and timeless evil. The doctor's laboratory, rather than the usual gloomy closet of other Jekyll-Hyde movies, is a huge, ghastly factory that evokes terror with emptiness and sterility.

And the soundtrack is magnificent. Let other moviemakers produce torrents of noise, Frears and his craftsmen have created layers of silence. In the hush of Jekyll's house, you seem to hear heartbeats as clearly as footsteps, mice scurrying within the wainscot, resentments murmuring within the breasts of servants, fog brushing against the windowpanes, and the hesitant thunder of a storm that doesn't dare to break.

So compelling are all these triumphs of design and technique that the movie feels unified while you watch it; the insufficiencies emerge only later, upon reflection. But there is a delicate creepiness to *Mary Reilly* that survives the skepticism of daylight. A financial failure, it's already being yanked from theaters, but you may want to rent the video at Halloween.

"It's a miracle us meeting. You're everything I've ever wanted to change in a man."

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Had *Before and After* been a good movie, it would have been a greater Jekyll-and-Hyde study than *Mary Reilly*. Or, at least, it would have been more immediately disturbing, for its first half suggests that we're watching a study of buried evil, or at least buried rage that has sprung into murderous action and left an adolescent girl dead at the hands of her sixteen-year-old boyfriend.

But if scriptwriter Ted Tally had had a gun held to his head and been ordered to expunge every bit of true drama from his screenplay, he couldn't have done a more thorough job of dramaturgical castration than he's accomplished here. After teasing us for an hour with the mystery of the teen-aged killer's nature, the film then reveals that there's been no murder at all, just an unfortunate and—as staged—totally preposterous accident. Whatever drama the second hour could produce must come from the psychological squirming of the father who has destroyed evidence in a misguided attempt to protect his child and now must face the consequences in and out of court. The situation could have produced some good, tense moments. There are few better ways of hooking an audience than by watching basically decent folks caught through their own frailties in the impersonal toils of the law (think of *The Fallen Idol*). But the two scenes needed to bring this situation to its climax—the court testimonies of each of the parents—aren't in the movie. Instead, each of the parents, after his or her testimony, comes running out of the courtroom and reports on what just happened. Less is more, a philosopher of architecture once told us. But nothing is nothing. Still, there is one kind of abundance here, for director Barbet Schroeder never skimps on visual clichés.

And how he has betrayed his actors! I won't discuss the juvenile players because I don't want to be charged with child-actor abuse. As the father, Liam Neeson is allowed to merely sketch his character as if warming up for a real performance in his next movie. But it is Meryl Streep who has really been brought down by this wretched movie. There are close-ups of her here, moist-eyed and blinking, that suggest a high school senior's idea of "emotional" acting. And did I hallucinate during the film's one bedroom scene or did Streep really tug her skirt down demurely over her knees as Neeson launched his hulk onto her, as if to tell us that, even during sex, she is every inch a lady? Barbet Schroeder has committed the unforgivable. He has taken the great Meryl Streep—so mysteriously sensual in *Sophie's Choice*, so earthy in *A Cry in the Dark*—and turned her into a dear, sweet, wee woman. The Spring Byington of the nineties. □

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Frank McConnell

DESECRATING LITERATURE

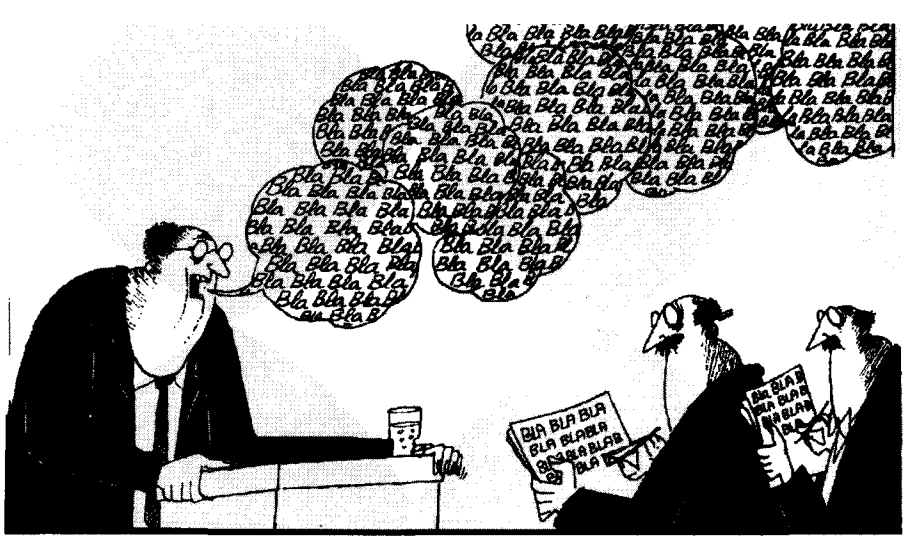
Reading the PMLA

For reasons too complicated to go into here, I recently found myself subscribed—for the first time since 1964, my first year as a graduate student at Yale—to *PMLA*. That's *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, and in my racket it's the boss journal. You get a piece in there, and your career isn't exactly made, but it's well on its way: like being a first-draft choice for the Celtics. The magazine has this cachet because the Modern Language Association, its parent group, is the only and I mean only organization of literature professors in the U.S., and has a stranglehold on the hiring process. Every year, just after Christmas, MLA holds its annual convention in some big city. And thousands of professors, and more importantly, grad-student/professor wannabees, flock there ostensibly to give and hear papers on literary topics. Right.

The fact is—I've been to one MLA convention in thirty years, and one was enough—it's about as dignified as any convention, and maybe less so. (At least the Shriners in Indianapolis admit they come there to party, something entirely beneath the self-image of your average MLA weenie, thank you very much.) Everybody gets drunk, nobody goes to the papers, and the grad students all try as hard as they can to ingratiate themselves to the various departments of English, Romance languages, etc., in their job interviews because this is the *one chance* you're going to get to be hired for next September, and start to pay off that gigantic loan you floated to write your Ph.D.

However, the convention is not my main point: it's not MLA I want to talk about, but *PMLA*, the journal, and how the journal is necessary and sufficient cause for the elimination of Departments of English altogether.

Nor am I kidding. I've spent my life teaching literature—or trying to—and I got into it because I thought it would be a fine and shining thing to spend a life loving, and sharing the love of, the dance of language and feeling that is the literature we have made, and that continues to make us: a vocation, if you will, and not a shabby one. Now I, like a lot of my colleagues, wonder what the hell ever happened to the mission we chose so gaily, and who these people are who now call themselves professors of literature. (Not to mention—we'll get to this—what damage they're doing to their students.)



I told Harold Bloom, over the phone, "It's just not the life I trained myself for." And he said—first time ever he'd really *replied* to me—"Yes. We lost."

Indeed we did. And the students did. And the university did, and most important, you did, if you have a kid in college or if you believe in the idea of college, or if you do something even as inoffensive as pay your taxes, which of course pays part of the salary of the strange folks who are now, in most of America's major universities, teaching something they call literature.

Okay. There have been a number of recent arguments that trends like "deconstruction," "multiculturalism," and "new historicism" in English studies are in fact silly, self-serving, anti-educational cults of specialists. Most of them, though, have come from nonacademics, journalists. And academics, than whom no one is more snobbish, easily sniff at attacks from that quarter: just another sign, the weenies think (and say) that the great unwashed can't hope to understand the complexity and importance of what *they* are doing. And when Harold Bloom, surely our most eminent and humane critic, said the same thing in his wonderful book, *The Western Canon* (Harcourt Press, 1994), the stuck-pig squeals of outrage from the tenured out-decibelled your average heavy metal concert.

I'm neither a journalist nor an eminence, neither a war correspondent nor a general. Essentially, I'm a grunt, and I'm here to tell you from the front lines that the situation is hopeless, and quite serious. We've produced a generation of teachers who cannot read, can barely write, and do not teach. We have turned the Department of Literature into, effectively, an asylum run by the inmates.

Here's one example, from the May 1995 *PMLA*. Donald Morton is professor of English at Syracuse University and the author of the essay, "Birth of the Cyberqueer." (You have to know that "queer theory" is the current flash word

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for studies of gay writers and the gay experience.) Here's the first sentence of his abstract—and *please* read it all:

> While the return of *queer* is usually explained locally as an oppressed minority's positive reunderstanding of a negative word, as the adoption of an umbrella to cover diverse marginal subjectivities or as a sign of generational difference, the term's reappearance must instead be historicized—systematically and globally—as one of the theoretical, cultural, and social changes that result from the uncritical acceptance (for class reasons) of the premises of ludic (post)modern theory in the dominant academy and the culture industry.

Now I've read and reread Morton's essay, and he actually has some fine and smart points to make. But that's not the point. *The* point is that he's a professor of English and can't write his native language; at least not when he's being a "professor" of it. Here's my rewrite of his sentence:

> When gay critics use the term, "queer," they often think they're taking a defiant stand against the mainstream; but in fact, they're only making themselves and their orientation sound trivial and marginal—which is just what the mainstream wants them to do. They're being *had*.

And it's not that I have a prejudice against gay studies: I was committee chair of the first-ever Ph.D. dissertation on gay American fiction at the University of California at Santa Barbara. This isn't a matter of life style, but of prose style, which is just as serious—wouldn't you rather meet Oscar Wilde in heaven than, say, Theodore Dreiser?—and Donald Morton has not a chemical trace of prose style. Language like this would make even a senior prom in Babylon sound like a painful duty.

But I'm being unfair to Morton, too. I chose his essay because it was awful (one has read assembly manuals from Taiwan with more verbal energy and punch), but not egregiously so. "Egregious"—*ex gregis*—means "standing out from the herd." But how, in a flock of bleating sheep like the contributors to *PMLA*, like the current clowns of the academic circus, do you single out one?

The answer is, you can't.

Here, from the March 1995 issue of *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, is a guy named Mark Jeffreys on lyric poetry: "I argue that the act of identifying lyric as either an oppositional genre or a reactionary one encourages oversimplification of the term's history and criticism and desensitizes readers to the ideological diversity of texts identified as lyrical."

Does anybody know what that sentence is trying, poor wounded thing, to say? I do, but only because I read it as a version of Orwellian "Newspeak," the official language of *1984*, a language whose purpose is not to convey, but to obscure information. In newspeak translation, Jeffreys is perfectly clear: *I don't know how to talk about lyric poetry. (But, God help me, I still like it).*

One's heart goes out to Jeffreys as to the other victims of the present virus; but one cannot ignore that they are also infecting others—namely, the students they teach and the other folks who read sentences like the one I have quoted and assume that that's the way humans are supposed to talk. It isn't, you know.

One more bleat from the academic sheepfold. *PMLA* January 1995. Here's Gwen Bergner, a graduate student at Princeton, concluding her essay titled "Who Is That Masked Woman? or, The Role of Gender in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*." Okay, the title alone is off-putting enough, especially if you've read Fanon's book, and know that he really doesn't *care* about "gender"—the term hadn't gotten hot by then—but was a serious, maybe great man writing about racism and colonialism. That doesn't stop Bergner from rereading him as a proto—but, natch, failed—feminist, only awaiting her interpretation of his work to liberate him, with the truly dopey sentence, "The most important effect of conjoining postcolonial psychoanalysis and feminist psychoanalysis may well be to clear a space for black women as subjects in both discourses."

Basta! Gay identity, colonialism, postcolonialism, racism, multiculturalism, and for that matter rap music and the alarming rise of glue-sniffing—all these things are within the borders of what I regard as literary and cultural studies. But so are Chaucer, Shakespeare, Henry James, Faulkner, and Shelley and G.M. Hopkins. And most especially is the ability to write a sentence that *says* what it means, says *no more* than what it means, and, with passion, *means* what it means. "Let there be light." "I will not serve." "On the whole, I'd rather be in Philadelphia." God at the creation, Satan at the mutiny, and W.C. Fields on his deathbed—these are all models of what language ought to be, and of what language is for.

And in the current academy, they might as well be the lost poets of Atlantis.

Quis custodiat ipsos custodes? asked Juvenal: "Who watches the watchmen?" And several centuries later, Milton wrote about selfish and self-serving pastors, "The sheep look up/And are not fed."

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Whoever is a real teacher takes everything, including himself, seriously only in relation to his students. That's a paraphrase from Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, and for once Nietzsche was right.

How this situation came about I'm not sure—nobody is—although I think it may have been simply that the "profession of English" just got to be too lucrative and secure a gig for people who, in painful truth, had no other special ambitions or talents: it became a psychic resort colony for imagination failures. And being failures, of course, they had to find reasons to deny or deface the very idea of success. What ensued was virtually an all-out war against literature itself, carried on by professors of literature.

I won't bore you with the details of the warfare, but I will discuss the casualties, and the signal casualty is of course the idea of civilized literary discourse altogether. This is deadly serious, and this is an issue of *trahison des clercs*, essentially the trivializing of the tradition by the *guardians of the tradition*.

A graduate student of mine, a wonderfully nice and smart person, recently told her class—she was a teaching assistant for somebody else's course, thank God—that they shouldn't read *The Great Gatsby* because it was antifeminist, capitalist, and homophobic.

Well, sure: you can read *Gatsby* that way if you wish; and you can read *King Lear* as a howl of male dominance, and the poetry of Emily Dickinson as a whimper of female inadequacy. And all you miss in those readings is only the reasons for reading them in the first place. All you miss is the glamour of language, the impossible but true chance—and isn't this something like the grace of God?—that our words can lead us to better places than we now inhabit. All that is lost is poetry.

There are universities that still value the impossible task of teaching literature, of showing kids how to gasp—but gasp articulately—at the caught ball, the complete couplet, the perfect diminished fifth, and the well-turned tale. But they are few, and their number shrinks, and their troops dwindle.

The simple fact is that the serious reading of literature can probably not much longer survive the university: The technophiles and trenderasts of *PMLA* have, by and large, taken over.

So what's left? A dream, maybe: the dream that we could all read this great stuff—Homer to William S. Burroughs—and agree that it was great stuff, and talk to one another about why it was great stuff, and how we could use it to make our own lives just a little more human. A dream of the civilized tradition (which *includes* all the darkness you can imagine). A dream that language, rightly used, could make us right.

The enterprise continues, of course: in the journals, in the newspapers, in the absurd, glorious act of writing itself. But not, or not much longer, I think, in our universities. Those places have been given over to the barbarians, and my guess is that they're here to stay for some time. □

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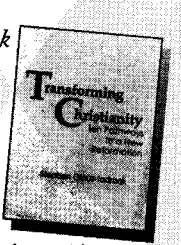

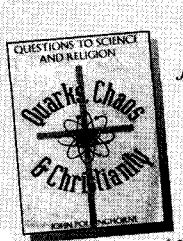

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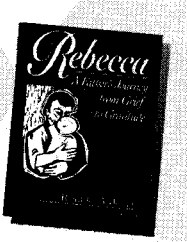

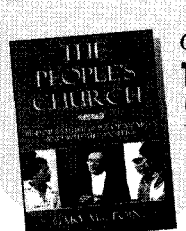

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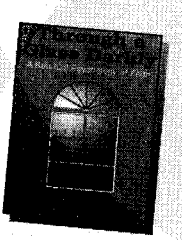

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Schools for scandal

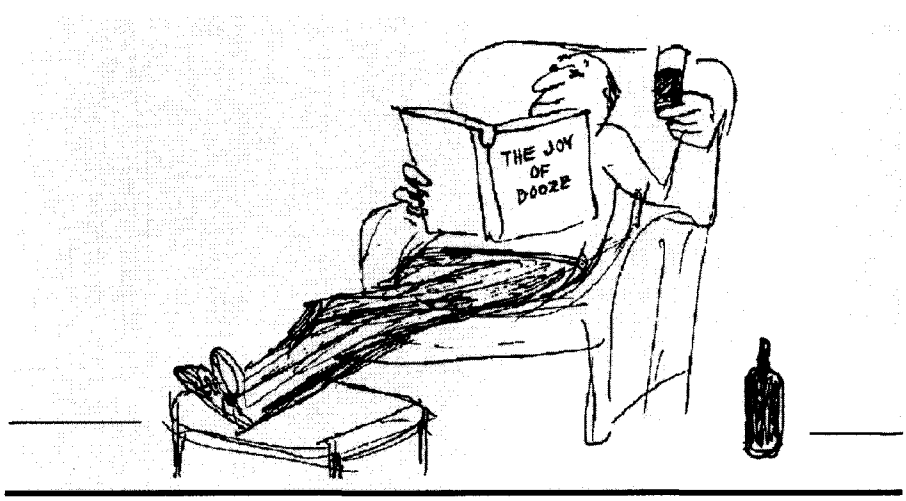
The Scandal of Pleasure
Art in an Age of Fundamentalism
Wendy Steiner
University of Chicago Press, $24.95, 251 pp.

Alan Wolfe

The loser in our recent culture wars was neither the Left nor the Right but the academy. Whatever position one takes on the canon, the best writing, and in many cases the sharpest thinking, was done by people independent of, or marginal to, academic career-tracking: Robert Hughes, Russell Jacoby, Camille Paglia. Books by academics, usually written in defense of the multicultural project, have tended to be jargonistic and persuasive only to the already convinced.

Wendy Steiner, the Richard L. Fischer Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania, is the first contributor to these debates who makes this professor proud to be one. Steiner asks one deceptively simple question: culture for what? And her answer, traditional in content but radical in the context of today's debates, is that culture liberates us from literalism. Art gives pleasure, and if each person's pleasure is different from others, so be it, for there is no expertise where aesthetic appreciation is concerned. From a painting or a great novel, we are transported to new worlds, ones that appeal, not to our sense of reality, but to our use of the imagination. Art stretches the mind, not for a particular purpose, but because human beings come with minds that crave being stretched. When we succumb to the seductive charms of a great work, we will ourselves to live with paradox: to be in the world and beyond it, to be able to think yet to be transported by emotion, and to have our values both undermined and reaffirmed.

From Steiner's point of view, what is most striking about the culture war is that both Right and Left agree in their basic aesthetic theories. To be sure, one side wants to ban Mapplethorpe photographs and the other wants everyone to see them, just as some condemn a book like *The Satanic Verses* as heresy while others praise it as great literature. But when a work gets caught in a political crossfire, literalness prevails on both sides. Senator Jesse Helms and Representative Dana Rorhbacher both know that the whole purpose of Mapplethorpe's art is pornographic, for what else can a picture of a naked boy be other than an invitation to pederasty? Yet when Janet Kardon, the curator of the Mapplethorpe exhibit which was eventually prosecuted in Cincinnati, was asked what made the pictures art, she could only reply in technical and formalistic terms, as if the language of the imagination was unavailable to her.



So serious have been our debates over these matters, Steiner believes, that we have lost the capacity for pleasure. Marxists, sneering down their noses at popular culture, write of the "commodity fetish" of late capitalism, the false consciousness contained in the deadly proposition that words and images can actually be enjoyed. Why not appropriate the term, Steiner muses. Art, she feels, is a fetish—rightly so since fetishes are things we enjoy because they are enjoyable. Let the Right win and we would have obedience and order. Let the Left win and we would have equality and social justice. Let either win and watch our appreciations of awe and wonder, the things that art provides, collapse.

Steiner, however, does get a bit carried away by her enthusiasms. Sex, she believes, is also a fetish, which is why she finds "adequate neither to women nor to art" the feminist notion that representations of sex are a form of rape. But surely not all pornography is art, just as not all art is pornographic. I agree with Steiner that a fear of pleasure runs throughout the writings of feminist censors such as Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon. But their

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failure to make distinctions between art and pornography doesn't mean that Steiner should fail as well.

Nor am I as convinced as Steiner is that education, enjoyable for its own sake, is also a fetish. Educational traditionalists, she writes, who claim to love learning for its own sake, want the university to serve explicitly political goals, such as reenforcing moral virtue. This is no different, in her opinion, from the view of learning offered by canon-reformer Catherine Stimson, who wrote that "literature permits the other, Hegel's slave, to speak." Both sides, Steiner urges, ought to recognize that "the separation of knowledge from practicality, morality, and action has always been an essential aspect of the idea of liberal education."

That formulation does not get the matter right. As Steiner's own examples demonstrate, efforts to distance humanistic learning from one practical end—rank vocationalism, for example—served another practical end—the training of a gentlemanly class, just as attempts to create a wall between education and religious morality was done in the name of secular morality. "Beauty, pleasure, individual transcendence, and self-sufficient value have been the promise of both art and education," Steiner writes. Yet artists were traditionally excluded from the university because the latter served practical goals alien to the former. It is not just Plato who wanted to ban poets.

In her concluding chapter, which is devoted to thinkers who were attracted to totalitarianism such as Anthony Blunt, Paul De Man, and Martin Heidegger, Steiner also blends realms a bit too quickly. We cannot, she maintains, simply dismiss out of hand Heidegger's nazism; to excuse him is to repudiate his philosophy, since Heidegger warned against searching for universal truths independent of time and place. And De Man, who loved literature and recognized its distance from life, nonetheless wound up advocating a theory of reading out of which all pleasure and wonder were drained. Such paradoxes remind Steiner that "thinking, like art, is both autonomous from the world and not autonomous from it. Intellectual life participates in the same antifundamentalist paradox that characterizes all the struggles documented in this book."

Yet there is no one kind of thinking called "thinking." Writing music or painting a scene is not the same thing as theorizing about the social world which in turn is different from writing literary criticism. Those who venture into political and social theory have an obligation which poets and musicians do not: to be responsible for the consequences of the actions they advocate. There is nothing paradoxical about anti-Semitism; writing about Jews the way they did, and at the time they did, Heidegger and De Man hurt real people in palpable ways. (Heidegger did more than write; he campaigned actively, with devastating results, against his Jewish mentor Edmund Husserl.) That does not mean that their thought is worthless or their ideas disproved. Still, I am more inclined than Steiner to think that Jacques Derrida, who argues that words can never have one meaning, proved the absurdity of his own ideas when he resorted to copyright law in a dispute with an American professor. But it does mean that those whose specific purpose is to describe or evaluate the real world have to be judged by different criteria than those whose purpose is to create imaginary ones.

The Scandal of Pleasure is not a work of the imagination but one of criticism and commentary. How unusual, then, that not only does it represent the reality of our culture wars with uncommon good sense, but is also an aesthetic pleasure in its own right. When she sticks to art, Steiner reminds us of the treasures the culture war is taking away from us. Even when she ventures into her more controversial (and less well supported) arguments, she offers much to ponder. If ever the last book on the culture wars is written, let us hope that this is the one. □

Alan Wolfe *is University Professor and professor of sociology at Boston University. His most recent book is* The Human Difference: Animals,Computers, and the Necessity of Social Science *(1993).*

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BUT WHAT ABOUT CELESTE?

Should We Burn Babar?
Essays on Children's Literature and the Power of Stories
Herbert Kohl
The New Press, $18.95, 192 pp.

The End of Education
Redefining the Value of School
Neil Postman
Alfred A. Knopf, $22, 209 pp.

Clare Collins

I am a product of a public school education—Farmland Elementary, Tilden Junior High, Charles W. Woodward High School, all in Montgomery County, Maryland. My one school-age child, John, now attends a public school, and will, I suspect, do so through high school. One hears a lot lately about the failures of public education in this country. And yet I believe that, so far at least, his education surpasses that which I received, both in quality and intensity.

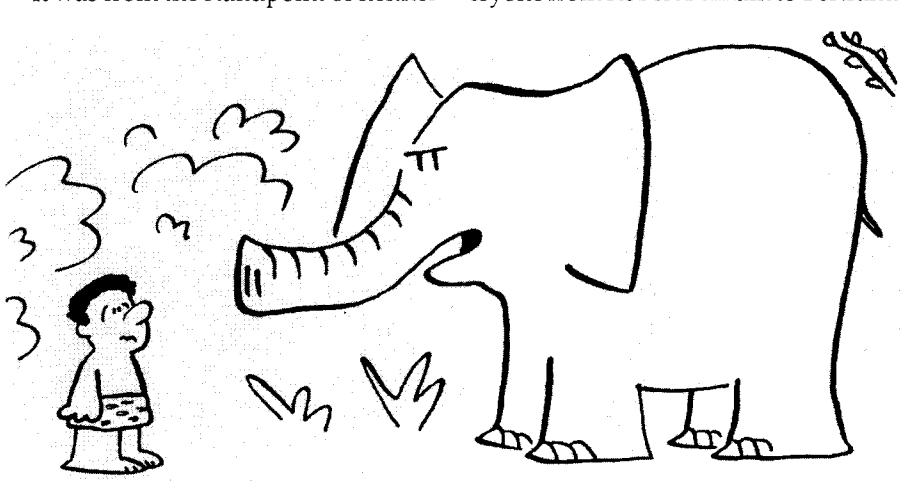
It was from the standpoint of neither educator nor scholar, but of citizen and consumer, that I read these two recent offerings in the education debate. Both authors see the public schools as an essential component of our democracy. What, then, they ask, should be the goals of that education and, more important still, how are they best achieved? This is the "End" which Postman refers to in his ambiguous title. These books also serve as a much-needed reminder that both public education, and, indeed, democracy—the authors see an important, if often overlooked role of public education as fostering a sense of civic pride—are not fixed, but evolving. As Kohl writes in his conclusion, the public schools are at the "center of community conflict and the struggle to make democracy a lived reality in the United States." Change, debate, even upheaval, do not predict a downfall, but insure against stagnation.

Should We Burn Babar? is by far the more compelling and, ultimately, useful, of the books. Kohl's carefully constructed essays and narratives left me convinced that he is a gifted educator as well as scholar. Postman, on the other hand, adopts the tone of the informed, but rambling (and at times tiresome) preacher/conversationalist, citing everyone from Robert Fulham to Bertrand Russell (affording them roughly equal weight). The first half of *The End of Education* discusses the metaphysical question of what "god" (read: purpose) education should serve. And here, Postman does well in describing the pitfalls of education's current overdependence on, as he labels them, the gods of technology and economic utility. (Postman is the author of *Technopoly*, among many other books.) I think it is rather brave, these days, to suggest that schools should not be in the business of teaching computer skills, and that their focus should not be on making sure children graduate ready to enter the workforce, but that they should teach children how to think.

Critiquing the numerous false gods modern-day education falls prey to, Postman goes on to propose some alternatives that might help schools achieve a sense of unified purpose. Here, I could have used something more specific. Postman is full of great ideas (among my favorites was suggesting that "museums" be a subject taught in high school or college), but often fails to give practical suggestions for implementing his grand ideas.

After reading these two books, I was embarrassed to realize that, when considering my own child's education, I, too, had lapsed into generalities. I had asked (or, rather, expected) that his education be good, thorough, rigorous—without giving much thought to what that meant in practical terms. What both Postman and Kohl provide, in this sense, is a sort of user's guide: A framework for how parents and educators might begin to view the purpose of education, both as a tool for educating our children and for strengthening our democracy.

Not that any parents seeking the definitive text on what their child should have learned by a certain grade will find the answers in either of these books. Unlike E.D. Hirsch, Jr., whose core curriculum series offers up a long (if somewhat arbitrary) list of exactly what a child should learn in a given grade, Kohl and Postman offer something less tangible, but, ultimately, more valuable. They ask the reader to consider not what kind of thoughts our children should be think-



"You may be King of the Apes, but don't get the idea that your jurisdiction extends to **elephants!***"*

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ing in school, but what kind of thinker schools ought to be producing.

Anyone seeking a model of clear and rational thinking has only to read the Kohl essays. While certainly of interest, I found the title piece, "Should We Burn *Babar*?", which addresses the issue of censorship, to be the least compelling. Kohl's conclusion that *Babar*, with its themes of colonialism, sexism, racism, and capitalism (not to mention murder) "would best be relegated to the role of collector's item" seemed, to my mind, a tacit endorsement of the very censorship he elsewhere argues against. Far more instructive were the essays "The Story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott Revisited" and "The Good Old Days. I was There. Where Was They?" which trace the history of public education in this country through the fictional experiences of several generations of one family.

In his Rosa Parks essay, Kohl argues that subtle racism has contributed to the mistelling of the story of the bus boycott and Mrs. Parks's role in it. It turns out that not only was the bus boycott a carefully planned action, but also that Mrs. Parks (Kohl objects to the tendency to address her as Rosa, as belittling) was not, as I myself had been taught in school, merely a tired seamstress who just happened to decide not to move to the back of the bus one day. Instead, she was an active member of the NAACP who was already deeply involved in the struggle for desegregation. Here, Kohl manages to instruct without preaching and to offer an alternative, in the form of a more correct (not to be confused with politically correct) telling of the story. How difficult that can be is aptly demonstrated here, as Kohl works and reworks his version, seeking the best possible narrative. The final product, in its balance and accuracy, drives home the point that education is, finally, about telling the truest story possible.

Kohl's essay tracing the history of public education is not only a pleasure, but manages to condense a large, potentially unwieldy topic into a clear, concise, and informative text. "People in our society have never agreed upon what is basic for education in a democracy," Kohl notes. Educational trends come and go with almost amusing regularity. Indeed, he argues that the constant search for new and better ways to teach is part of the American educational tradition—and it's bound to continue. As Kohl writes, "It is definitely worth taking a look at where we have been in order to illuminate where we are and what we need to do...to revitalize public education and reaffirm our faith in democracy."

Both of these books served to buoy the spirits of this citizen, making me feel part of a noble struggle—to preserve and support public education as an evolving and vital institution. As Kohl concludes, "...no matter what current conditions seem to indicate, there is no child, no person, who cannot learn and grow through the generous efforts of others." □

Clare Collins *is a free-lance writer. She lives in Pawcatuck, Connecticut.*

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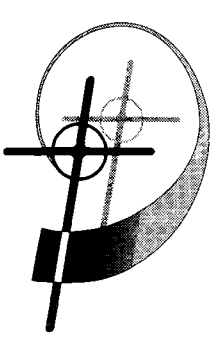

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BEING AROUND WORDS

Manhattan, When I Was Young
Mary Cantwell
Houghton Mifflin, $21.95, 214 pp.

Modern American Memoirs
Annie Dillard and Cort Conley, Editors
HarperCollins, $27.50, 449 pp.

Madeline Marget

Mary Cantwell's intense and generous memoir is about marriage, motherhood, work, Manhattan's aura, and the needs and consequences of a sensitive person's spiritual and emotional life. Despite the small size of the book, it does all this in depth: it's a true story, though just as real as serious fiction.

American Girl, Cantwell's previous memoir, told of her childhood and adolescence in Bristol, Rhode Island. *Manhattan, When I Was Young* continues the story of family, place, and identity and is richer than the earlier, also excellent, book—perhaps because this one deals with a period of social as well as personal stress and change.

In 1953, newly graduated from college and feeling herself to be already committed to the man she was to marry (called only "B." in the book), because she had slept with him, Cantwell started her life in New York. On one level, *Manhattan, When I Was Young* is about New York; Cantwell's addresses, changing over the years but mostly in Greenwich Village, divide the book into sections, and are landmarks in her life. She evokes the scenery and feel, and sometimes even the smell, of her New York, and the picture of the work she did as a young woman is both entertaining and chilling. Cantwell worked for fashion magazines, first *Mademoiselle* and later *Vogue*, places where trivia and temperament reigned, and where no one thought a young woman needed to support herself. Cantwell also reminds us of the era's totems: dinners at which *boeuf bourguignon* was the main course, and the topic of competitive conversation was likely to be one's literary tastes ("Anything by Graham Greene!").

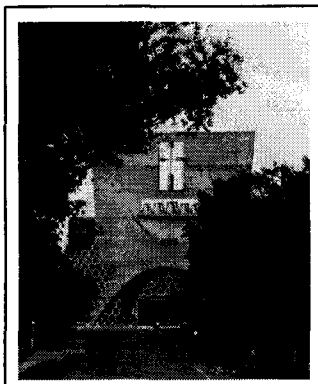
However, the most striking and valuable quality of this fine book is the author's remarkable ability to see herself both intimately and objectively. During sleepless nights, Cantwell talks to the woman she used to be, saying she doesn't know or understand her. Melancholy is a persistent tone. Social, sexual, and psychological expectations are the source of great unhappiness. Cantwell is glad to follow the lead, if not the orders, of her husband—who is an emotional stand-in for her lost father, whom she always wants to please, and for whom she constantly grieves. She is torn between the desire to stay home with her children and the need to have a career—a real New Yorker must work. After her first child is born, she suffers a breakdown. Afterwards, though she has recovered her sanity, her love for her child frightens her. And, perhaps because of her understanding of church teaching (during the period covered in this book she is a lapsed Catholic), she does not like sex, except when the purpose is to conceive a child.

Cantwell gives no simple happy ending. She suffers great and lasting pain when B., about whom she writes with loving respect, leaves her for another woman. She implies that one of her children has had serious emotional problems. All the same, this is not a sad book. When Cantwell asks two priests—one in New York and one in Amsterdam—for absolution, they don't give her the formula she expects, but instead tell her to go easier on herself.

Manhattan, When I Was Young implies that she has taken that advice. Cantwell, now on the editorial board of the *New York Times*, writes with self-assurance and with love: For her children, for B., for the world she has chosen to show, and for her work. Despite the nostalgia her title announces, and the regret she mentions, her writing also reveals a life of hope, accomplishment, and meaningful self-knowledge. "I have never wanted to be anyplace but around words," Cantwell says. Readers can be grateful.

Modern American Memoirs gives us thirty-five excerpts in 449 pages, and the editors give the titles and authors of almost two hundred books as additional personal favorites. The result is that I now have a lifetime reading list. Remember Graham Greene's *A Sort of Life*, and *Ways of Escape*? Henry Louis Gates's *Colored People*? Diana Trilling's *The Beginning of the Journey*? Hats off to Dillard and Conley for narrowing their excerpted selections to a mere three dozen.

Many of these memoirs are striking and memorable despite their brevity. Hamlin Garland unsentimentally presents his boyhood on a farm as an ex-



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perience in a pastoral paradise. Ralph Ellison tells of circulating a petition to right a social wrong in the 1930s and in the process coming upon a group of rough-spoken African-American men, working as "coal heavers" in an apartment house's basement, and arguing loudly and with intimate knowledge about opera—they often worked as extras in Metropolitan Opera productions. "The subject of their contention confounded all my assumptions regarding the correlation between educational levels, class, race, and the possession of conscious culture."

Cynthia Ozick sits reading, looking, and listening in her parents' pharmacy as an aspiring artist and intellectual. The pages from Reynolds Price's *Clear Pictures* give a sense of that writer's ability to encapsulate experience with beauty and soul.

My only quibble with *Modern American Memoirs* is that the selections aren't long enough. Of course, if I had been given more, I would then be faced with pages enough to fill several sets of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. *Modern American Memoirs* is a good introduction to many wonderful writers. *Manhattan, When I Was Young* offers a fuller, multi-layered acquaintanceship. The best of two worlds. □

Madeline Marget *is the author of* Life's Blood *(Simon and Schuster).*

NOT TO WORRY

The Manufactured Crisis
Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools
David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle
Addison-Wesley, $25, 412 pp.

Possible Lives
The Promise of Public Education in America
Mike Rose
Houghton Mifflin, $24.95, 453 pp.

Philip G. Altbach

These books are a welcome antidote to the gloom and doom that one constantly reads about the state of public education in America. The authors see the public schools as the essential cornerstone of American education and a central element in the social fabric. And they argue that public education is not in crisis. Both books have an explicit political agenda—to provide some counter arguments to the drumbeat of school bashing that has characterized so much of the public discourse on education since the 1983 Education Department *Nation at Risk* report.

Berliner and Biddle argue that the educational debate has been highjacked by what they call the "far right," the "religious right," and the "neoconservatives," with the help of conservative think tanks such as the American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation. During the Reagan and Bush administrations, and especially during the term of office of William Bennett as secretary of education, there was nonstop criticism of public education. Berliner and Biddle go on to argue that the Clinton administration has absorbed some of the rhetoric of the Republicans—it is not coincidental, they claim, that Clinton's educational proposal, Goals 2000, has a title quite similar to Bush's America 2000.

The Manufactured Crisis is a sophisticated critique of school bashing, followed by some not terribly revolutionary proposals. The heart of the book is the critique. The authors, both prominent educational researchers, painstakingly pick apart the claims made by the critics of the schools over the past decade. Their basic argument is that American education is not in crisis, and that in fact it does a pretty good job under increasingly difficult circumstances, and that the critics are motivated by ideology and not a concern for the nation's children. Berliner and Biddle bring a sense of outrage to their analysis—as researchers themselves, they are shocked that others would fudge the data, provide incom-

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plete analysis, and on occasion deliberately mislead the public.

They point to what they call "myths" about American education. Contrary to the critics, they claim that student achievement has not seriously declined. For example, the small declines nationally in SAT test scores are not statistically significant, they argue. Further, the number of students taking the SAT has dramatically increased, and a much more varied group is now taking the exam. They also point out that there is much research that says the SAT does not have much predictive power anyway. Berliner and Biddle go on to discuss many of the other measures of student achievement used by the critics, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and provide an alternative explanation of each that shows a more positive picture of school achievement. Contrary to the criticism, they claim that funding plays a central role in determining school quality and student achievement. Berliner and Biddle contest other "facts"—about the undersupply of scientists and engineers (they don't see a shortage), the poor quality of teacher education (it has significantly improved and, anyway, most education majors have a strong liberal arts background before they take professional courses), and the claim that private schools are better than public schools. The authors' reading of the research results is at variance with the mainstream debate. Their aim is to get people to think seriously about underlying assumptions and about the use of complex research data.

While there is no crisis, the authors concede there are problems. These problems can be solved by more adequate funding, more research, and more compassion. The abdication of the federal government from supporting public education is also criticized. Dramatic discrepancies in funding exist between wealthy, largely suburban districts and the large public school systems. The authors argue that more equality in funding would result in overall improvement. They also cite the tremendous problems faced by the public schools, especially those in the cities serving populations with low incomes and a multiplicity of social problems.

While the crisis discussed in this book may be manufactured by the conservatives, Berliner and Biddle can also be accused of selectively using data. For example, they point out that there is little evidence that simply lengthening the school day or year results in more learning. But they fail to discuss a considerable body of research indicating that "time on task" affects learning and achievement. There is some evidence that American schools spend less time on subject-matter instruction than schools in many other countries. While there is some discussion of the comparisons of U.S. student achievement with other countries, the authors do not successfully refute a very large body of research that consistently ranks Americans lower.

"That's nice. What else have we learned at school?"

Despite some shortcomings, *The Manufactured Crisis* is an important book not only because it provides a thoughtful alternative perspective on current debates about public education, but because it cogently argues that much of that debate is politically motivated and is part of a well-orchestrated and funded critique of the public schools.

Mike Rose, a professor of education at UCLA, has written a paean of praise for America's public schools. *Possible Lives* tells the story of teachers and children at schools across the nation. Rose spent several years looking in on schools in such places as the California-Mexico border, Los Angeles, Montana, Mississippi, New York City. He was careful to choose schools which were not in the wealthy suburbs. He has selected success stories, and feelingly writes of the commitment of teachers, principals, parents, and communities working in difficult circumstances. Kids want to learn, and the schools Rose writes about teach them, and also provide a supportive social environment.

There is a certain "gee whiz" tone to *Possible Lives*. Of course, there are great examples of commitment and accomplishment. One wonders, however, if Mike Rose has read Jonathan Kozol's moving *Savage Inequalities*, which points to examples of awful neglect and terrible standards in some schools, especially in the inner cities. Kozol argues that the vast differences in funding are part of the pattern of inequality. Such examples of poor education could no doubt be found within a few miles of Rose's UCLA campus. There is, of course, nothing wrong with highlighting good things, but the stories told in *Possible Lives*, while heart-warming, do not provide us with the tools for improving education—or even of understanding the context of the good and the bad in the schools.

One hopes that these books will receive even a tenth of the attention lavished on the likes of William Bennett or Diane Ravitch. We do need a real debate about public education. □

Philip G. Altbach *is professor of education and director of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College.*

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POLAND'S DOUBLE-LIFE

The Catholic Church and Anti-Semitism
Poland, 1933–39
Ronald Modras
Harwood Academic, $48, 429 pp.

Karski
How One Man Tried to Stop the Holocaust
E. Thomas Wood and Stanislaw M. Jankowski
John Wiley & Sons, $24.95, $16.95 (paper), 316 pp.

Eugene J. Fisher

Last year marked the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II and the liberation of Auschwitz. Two recent books shed light on the Catholic community of Poland before and during Nazi occupation.

Ronald Modras, a professor of theological studies at Saint Louis University, painstakingly surveyed the entire range of Polish Catholic publications in the years preceding the German invasion. The results reveal a disconcertingly high level of what today can be called anti-Semitic attitudes, stereotypes, and prejudices, even to the extent of vocal church support for the anti-Jewish economic boycott that spread through Europe in the 1930s.

Modras, himself a Polish-American, presents these results with admirable candor and thoroughness. His thoughtful analysis of the data, however, provides challenges and surprises for those who may wish to classify Polish culture and Polish Catholicism as simply "anti-Semitic." Modras finds, for example, relatively few appeals in Polish Catholic literature to the traditional theological categories of medieval Christianity that French historian Jules Isaac so aptly called the "teaching of contempt." The Polish church was not only aware of but strongly and consistently condemned Nazi racialist anti-Semitism and, indeed, any form of violence toward Jews.

A classic example of the ambivalent attitude of the Polish clergy of the period is found in the oft-cited pastoral letter of the primate, August Cardinal Hlond, issued on February 29, 1936. Modras, noting that the passage on "the Jewish question" is "usually quoted only in part," provides it in its entirety. Hlond repeats anti-Jewish allegations common at the time. (Modras notes and illustrates at some length that these same allegations were commonly found also in the "influential Rome-based journal," *La Civiltà Cattolica*, lest the reader conclude that such attitudes were unique to Poland.) Hlond points to Jewish involvement in Masonic "freethinking," "atheistic communism," "spreading pornography," and "practicing usury." Although he admits that "not all Jews are this way" and that "there are very many who are believers, honest, just, kind, and philanthropic," with a "healthy, edifying sense of family," he concludes that Jewish support for such causes as separation of church and state amounts to "waging war against the Catholic church," so that "it is good to prefer your own kind when shopping, to avoid Jewish stores...and especially boycott the Jewish press."

But just when today's reader may be tempted to write off the Polish church, Hlond strikes a note that also reflects teachings in *La Civiltà Cattolica* and attitudes expressed even more strongly by Pope Pius XI. He condemns anti-Semitism: "I warn against the moral stance, imported from abroad, that is basically and ruthlessly anti-Jewish. It is contrary to Catholic ethics. One may love one's own nation more, but one may not hate anyone. Not even Jews....It is forbidden to beat up, maim, or slander Jews. One should love Jews as human beings and neighbors, even though we do not honor the indescribable tragedy of that nation, which was the guardian of the idea of the Messiah and from which was born the Savior. When divine mercy enlightens a Jew to sincerely accept his and our Messiah, let us greet him into our Christian ranks with joy."

Herein lies a surprise and a challenge for traditional views of anti-Semitism as a direct outflow of medieval Christian anti-Judaism. In Hlond's pastoral, as in so much of the Polish-Catholic literature of the period, the anti-Jewish appeals are

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cultural, economic, and secular, not at all religious in character. The condemnation of "anti-Jewish violence," on the other hand, is theological in nature, appealing very directly to the New Testament and church teaching for its moral force.

The distinction between economic and racial anti-Semitism made by Polish Catholic literature in the interwar period is not one that can be countenanced today. But at the same time we can recognize that it is, historically, of a different character from Nazi anti-Semitism. The predominant Polish-Catholic attitude illustrated by Cardinal Hlond may have given support to a boycott of Jewish businesses, but, left to itself, it could not have led to genocide. Insofar as it saw a "Jewish problem," it offered the solution of conversion, or, for some Catholics, political support for the cause of Zionism. In major statements issued in 1991 and again on the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz in 1995, the Polish bishops' conference began the painful process of confronting the Polish church's past and moving toward reconciliation and change for the future.

Modras's book contains numerous insights that will enrich and complexify scholarly understanding of anti-Semitism and Polish Catholicism. The biography of one Polish Catholic, Jan Karski, will enrich and edify anyone who reads it. Karski was a young Polish officer with aspirations for a career as a diplomat when the Nazis began World War II with their surprise *blitzkrieg* attack on Poland. He was to emerge from the war an authentic hero. Karski began as a courier taking information out of occupied Poland to the Polish government in exile in London. The narrative woven by Wood and Jankowski is highly dramatic. At one point Karski is caught by the Germans and tortured. He escapes and returns to Poland.

Karski's contacts with the Polish underground led him into contact with the Jewish underground. He was invited into the Warsaw ghetto and into a concentration camp to see for himself what went on there, so that he could bring word of it by personal witness to the West, which knew more than it wanted to believe about what was going on. He did. It was worse than he imagined it could be.

The story of Karski's valiant but largely futile attempts to convince Allied leaders, including British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden and American President Franklin Roosevelt, to believe what was happening to the Jews, and to do something about it, is compelling and filled with moral lessons for today. After the war, with the Communists having taken over his homeland, Karski settled in Washington, D.C., where he became a distinguished professor at Georgetown University. Declared a righteous gentile by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem for his efforts on behalf of the Jews, Karski was made an honorary citizen of the State of Israel on May 12, 1994. □

Eugene J. Fisher *is associate director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, D.C.*

WORLDS LOST & FOUND

A Book that Was Lost and Other Stories

S. Y. Agnon, edited with introductions by Alan Mintz and Anne Golomb Hoffman

Schocken Books, $27.50, 436 pp.

Carolyn Cohen

This collection of short stories by Nobel Prize-winner S. Y. Agnon presents a world remote to most readers. Many of the stories are folk tales in which the late Israeli writer conveys both his reverence for and ambivalence toward the Orthodox Jewish tradition that shaped his imagination. His childhood recollections of early twentieth-century Jewish life in Hungary provide the spiritual context for his experience of modern Israeli society. His style, often grounded in references to biblical and rabbinical texts, can feel heavy-handed for a postmodernist. Still, the characters' conflicts with their own desires also remind us of how we are imprisoned and liberated by our own deeply held modern attitudes and beliefs.

The pleasure in reading these stories comes from their humor and irony. The stories deftly observe how the religious context of an orthodox tradition converges with individual experience. One hears in the first autobiographical recollections as well as in the more contemporary stories, the voice of a narrator charmed by the biblical interpretations of a tradition. At the same time, the narrator gently parodies the moral certainty that can result from an exclusive reliance on an encyclopedic knowledge of a tradition. Agnon combines a seeming childlike innocence, the sophisticated understanding of a rabbinical scholar, and the urbane wit of a seasoned artist.

In stories such as "Agunot," "A Book that Was Lost," and "The Sign," characters are often trapped within a tragicomic situation and exiled not so much from a place but from their deeper sources of emotional and spiritual fulfillment. In the book's first story, "Agunot," the daughter of a wealthy man about to enter an arranged marriage with a young rabbi finds herself in love with the craftsman her father hired to make the ark for the wedding. In this and other stories framed in the idealized context of a folk tale, Agnon always subverts our expectations. These stories, so embedded in a religious tradition, do not easily realize the psychological realism of some of his novels, particularly his later novel *Shira*. The conflicts in the stories exist not between characters but more between the narrator's sense of an outer and inner life, where the inner life is driv-

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en by desires, premonitions, and dreams.

Agnon captures human instincts in memorable ways. While not all the stories are couched in a biblical language, "Agunot" sets a pattern. In Hebrew, *Agunot* means "Souls in Limbo." The story develops around certain themes of the Song of Songs, where the relation of the Holy One to Israel is likened to that of a lover and beloved. In Agnon's story, the Holy One is humorously portrayed as both a devoted parent and as a weaver of the prayer shawl of deeds.

The story begins, "A thread of grace is spun and drawn out of the deeds of Israel and the Holy One, blessed be He, Himself, in His glory, sits and weaves...a tallit for Israel to deck herself in...Radiant in the light of her beauty...There are times when some hindrance creeps in and snaps a thread in the loom."

The prayer shawl emerges as a metaphor associated with what can protect and unravel meaning in our lives. The daughter, characterized as "not knowing her own heart," is lured by the song of the ark craftsman, Ben Uri. The ironic and playful parallels between the craftsman and the Holy One making the prayer shawl enhance the psychological complexity of the daughter's attraction to one who cannot be possessed. Her sweet and docile nature is shattered when she smites the ark after the "Evil one has told her that the ark separates her from her beloved." With this action, the focus of the story shifts to her intended bridegroom, a young rabbi who is now seen as victim. The young rabbi's prophetic dream of the craftsman brings him to a self-awakening and exile. The beauty of this story hinges on the way vulnerable characters are transformed by growing self-awareness.

The translators' commentaries, which include a guide to structure and religious allusions, tend to oversimplify the emotional texture of these tales. These stories should be read in light of Agnon's scholarly books, *Days of Awe* (1965) and *Present at Sinai.*

Biblical scholarship has been vital to shaping Agnon's identity as a writer. For example, in the title story, "A Book that Was Lost," the narrator discovers a book by one of his favorite rabbinic scholars. Why and how the book gets published and sent to Jerusalem is explained. It becomes clear that sending the book involves letting go. "There are things you do out of love, but nevertheless you do not hasten to complete them." The book is likened to a kite that a child holds "as long as it stays in his hand, it belongs to him, but when he lets it fly, it disappears high in the sky and he is left empty-handed." The book serves as a metaphor for a way of perceiving the world that is slowly vanishing.

The last story, "The Sign," is focused on a sense of place. Agnon's home in Israel was destroyed in 1929 by an Arab invasion. Here he writes about exile and homelessness in a land he once viewed as a refuge. Boundaries between his life in Israel and his past in Eastern Europe slip away as the narrator's mystical vision allows him to see and hear the words of a medieval Jewish poet, Solomon Ibn Gabirol. Gabirol's poetry

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keeps the past alive for the narrator, who is poised between dissolution of one world and emerging conflicts of another.

At times Agnon speaks as the romantic, and in other instances he shows how easily we forget how dislocation and exile assume the guises of home. □

Carolyn Cohen *writes about literature and film. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

PERFECT TIMING

Writing Home
Alan Bennett
Random House, $25, 417 pp.

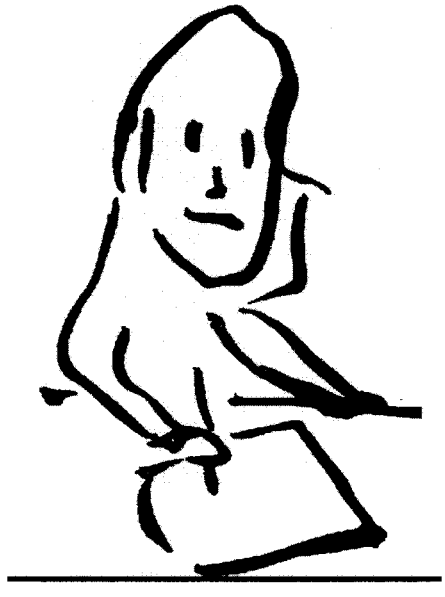
Edward T. Wheeler

The dust jacket of *Writing Home* tells us that this was a number-one best-seller in England. As it happens, its author's profile also sits on the cover of the 1996 David Levine Calendar. Still, American readers might ask with understandable hesitation, "Alan Who?" To bracket him by the extremes of his career: most recently a moviegoer would know him as the screenwriter of *The Madness of King George* and, at the other end of the scale, if memory harks back to 1962 and the *Beyond the Fringe* revue on Broadway, Alan Bennett clowned with the Peter Cook, Dudley Moore, and Jonathan Miller. To offer a third point of reference, any inveterate PBS-TV viewer will have enjoyed Bennett's brilliant *Talking Heads* series, broadcast some years ago. In one, "Love Among the Lentils," Maggie Smith gave an extraordinary performance in a rare bit of what television (and Bennett) does best.

The book, as the author confesses, is difficult to classify. There are the diaries, prefaces, texts of television plays, book reviews, and pieces done for various British periodicals. "To write home" has to mean to take up pen to tell the family what has happened, and this miscellany functions as Bennett's way of telling those of us who admire his work about his life as playwright, television writer, comedian, and actor. And there might lie the greatest obstacle in the path of the book's move to the top of the best-seller list here: *Writing Home* offers a first-name (and sometimes only a one- or two-initial) account of British theater and television. To savor the perspective you need to have a sense of the personalities and the productions in which they were featured; however, the *Who's Who* necessary for an American reader has yet to be written. We happily enough meet a sufficient number of luminaries (John Gielgud for one) to get our bearings in the diaries and in the notes or prefaces to Bennett's plays, but the anecdotes and the one-liners make any concern for the biographies of the people named fade away. Nevertheless, it is simply a pleasure to read Bennett.

The introduction sets the tone; the effect, genial, unprepossessing, is something like that of a gracious host's, who you imagine is self-conscious only insofar as he is asking, "Am I doing enough to entertain these people whom I hardly know?" His style follows an aesthetic of gaps, which is the same rule governing a great comedian's timing: the sense to know when not to say something. Much he sketches in and much more he leaves out, so that the story of his life at Oxford, as a teacher and a research student, is reduced to small strips of detail, with the empty spaces in between filled with a close-up of a friend or a project. The history of his life becomes something that happened to him, not something about which he asserts, "I did such and such." It is possible to see the same aesthetic operating in *The Madness of King George*. The plot and the details are clear and beautifully filled-out, but the film itself leaves a gap: it offers little more by way of meaning than, "It happened to him." To the question, "What is the point?" Bennett might answer, both to his career and to his film, "It is in the gaps."

All of this should not suggest a lack of substance in the work or the man. Bennett's relationships with three old, mad women offer a sense of his moral sensibility. "Mam," senile and in a nurs-



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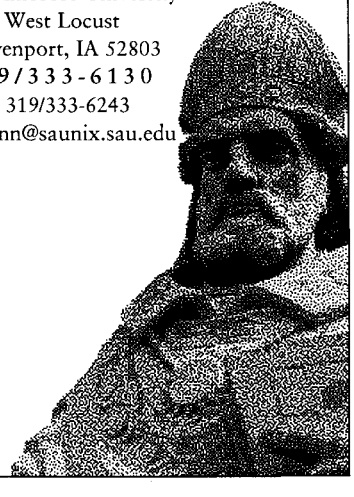

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ing home in the west of England, Rose, a neighbor in a New York apartment house who screams at the ceiling, and Miss Shepherd, the woman in the van outside his London row house. The extent to which these women affect Bennett as more than curiosities or annoyances reveals his generosity of spirit; they also show his humility. Miss Shepherd is the focus of a thirty-page account (and again the gaps in the explanations are revealing) which spans their fifteen-year relationship; Bennett offered her heroically understated charity and she the inspired zaniness of the mad. But he does not let us or himself forget the quixotic dedication of her life, its misery and frustrations, the incontinence pads, the filth of her van, her demands tapped daily at his window, nor her essential dignity.

At one point in his diaries, Bennett remarks on: "The same conflict in church (particularly when a service is being said) that I feel in art galleries, a need to stay and go at the same time...It's a sense that there is something to be had here and I ought to have the patience to wait on it, while the other (generally stronger) urge is get out and think about it later." He is clearly not a believer, but his upbringing was Anglican and his sense of liturgy appropriate for a dramatist. He comments astutely on the change in liturgical practices (the funerals of theatrical people accounting often for the focus), and in "Comfortable Words" addressed to the Prayer Book Society, one dedicated to the Anglican equivalent of Latin liturgy, he takes on directly the issue of aesthetic as opposed to devotional purpose. As he warns the Society about overstressing the beauty of the old ways he recalls that Miss Shepherd (Yes, she was R.C.) was buried in the worst of modernized Catholic rites; but noting this Bennett admits, "my liturgical fastidiousness was sheer snobbery." It was the affirmation of fellowship, the "Peace be with you" offered and received by an old man at the funeral which inspires Bennett to remind the society as to the origins of its beloved *Book of Common Prayer*: "[Bishop] Cramner did not die for English prose." The allusion and, one imagines, the timing involved in this ending are wholly representative of the writer's style.

In a piece on Kafka (subject of one of Bennett's plays) and in essays on Philip Larkin and Auden, Bennett works brilliantly as a critic. Despite his disclaimer that he has neither the "breadth of reading and reference" to do such work and that he ends up "either covering up or showing off" the piece on Kafka alone would make the book worth buying. And to continue to offer reasons to read *Writing Home*: the very grab-bag effect of the contents which might be divisive is in fact one of its attractions. The voice, as varied as the topics, is still steady, funny—one liners everywhere—and the whole driven by fearsome honesty. Bennett is laconic and refuses to spare the truth. The sardonic force of much of the comment arises out of a refusal to fake. □

Edward T. Wheeler *is dean of the faculty at the Williams School in New London, Connecticut.*

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Lawrence S. Cunningham

I have often told my students that the variety of mass-produced crucifixes which hang in every Notre Dame classroom provide, when looked at closely, a compressed history of the development of Christological piety. From the cross with a corpus on it to the bare cross it represents a leap of some centuries of religious sensibility. Similarly, the corpus begins to possess "passion" characteristics of wounds, crown of thorns, nails, etc. as a result of a developed medieval piety. Finally, that the corpus is more or less anatomically correct is a gift of early Renaissance observation while the typical vee-shaped position of arms relative to the hanging head comes, say, from the powerful impact of sixteenth/seventeenth-century masters like Velasquez and Rubens.

What I recount as a homely classroom illustration has been magisterially fleshed out in Sloyan's immensely learned and highly readable study. Sloyan's account tackles the crucifixion of Jesus as an historical event as well as its subsequent impact on the minds and hearts of believers (its *mythos*) and, finally, its significance for those who see themselves as disciples of Jesus (faith).

The Crucifixion of Jesus: History, Myth, Faith,
by Gerard S. Sloyan,
Fortress, $16, 228 pp.

Sloyan both explains how in the medieval period in the West the Crucifixion of Jesus slowly became detached from his Resurrection, and how Christian thinkers began to elaborate theories about how the death (and Resurrection) of Jesus was, in the Pauline language, "for us" and "for our sins." This latter issue, of course, demands attention to a tradition that runs from the Fathers through Anselm, Abelard, and the medieval thinkers through the Reformers and down to the present day when liberationists of various schools attempt to assess the meaning of salvation through an extended meditation on the cross.

These large topics, deftly chronicled by Sloyan, are interwoven with wonderful pages on the evolution of devotional practices connected to the cross: gestures of prayer; the "sign of the cross"; Passion plays; flagellation; devotion to the "five wounds"; and so on. Finally, Sloyan considers the Crucifixion from the perspective of Judaism (he is very good on the embedded anti-Judaism of much of this development); Islam (the Q'ran seemingly denies that Jesus died on the cross); as well as of Hinduism and Buddhism.

Gerard Sloyan is a religious educator and this book does justice to both of those terms. This is a religious book in that Sloyan writes as a learned believer on a topic which is central to our faith. But the Crucifixion is also a topic, as Paul noted two millennia ago, that is a "stumbling block" and a "folly." Sloyan is an educator who can take an enormously complicated doctrine and present it both historically and theologically with clarity, fairness, and insight. This is a very fine work from which I have profited enormously. When next I point to the crucifix to make a point to my students about the complexity of Christology, I will have fresh things to say thanks to the graceful pages of this study.

Joseph Fitzmyer belongs to that generation of superb American Catholic biblical exegetes such as Raymond Brown and Roland Murphy, who, though now *emeriti* professors, still produce outstanding work. The pride of American Catholic biblical scholarship, they are also conspicuous for having had the energy and commitment to share their scholarship with the broader Catholic public. Their books advance biblical literacy and a deeper sense of authentic Christian spirituality rooted in the Word.

Fitzmyer's long-awaited commentary on Romans appeared in the Anchor Bible commentary series in 1993. This current work takes Romans as a text for a series of meditations done in the style of an Ignatian eight-day retreat. There are twenty-four chapters, each structured with a selection from Paul followed by meditative points, a series of reflective questions, and a concluding colloquy prayer most commonly drawn from the psalter. If one were to read three chapters a day as a meditative exercise there would be more than enough material to fill up the eight days of retreat.

Spiritual Exercises Based on Paul's Letter to the Romans,
by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J.,
Paulist, $14.95, 236 pp.

I say "more than enough" because I

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was not on retreat when I worked my way through this work. Instead, I "did" two chapters a morning (during Advent) and discovered that there was more material than I could readily handle. This difficulty is partially explained by the fact that Romans is a very difficult text to follow in places, and is made all the more difficult because of the necessity of constantly referring back to the text to follow Fitzmyer's "points." My conclusion is that this is not a text to be read in haste but in a spirit of leisure. I suspect that Father Fitzmyer would agree that such was his intention.

It may not be out of place to note that his choice of Romans is a rather audacious one. The standard text(s) for an Ignatian retreat would be, and in the *Exercises* are, the Gospel narratives vividly "imagined" through the "composition of place." Nonetheless, Fitzmyer makes the cogent argument that Pauline materials are neglected in Ignatius (in reaction to the Lutheran emphasis on Romans?), and he attempts to right that imbalance. This is a rich and underutilized resource for meditative and contemplative study, especially Fitzmyer's superb three chapters on Romans 8.

This is the sort of book that I, for one, love to see come along. Written for an intelligent reader, it seamlessly blends learning and piety, and is a welcome relief from the steady but thin stream of what often passes for "spirituality." I only lament that along with the index of scriptural citations there was not a topical index.

Books and Readers in the Early Church,
by Harry Y. Gamble,
Yale University Press, $32.50, 337 pp.

Christianity is, along with Judaism and Islam, commonly denominated by the phrase, a "religion of the Book." In this extremely well-written and thoroughly researched work, Gamble asks to what extent the early church used books, how were they produced, and for what audiences? These are important questions both because there was not a high degree of literacy in the period in question (Gamble makes the educated guess that 10 to 15 percent of the general population in the Roman Empire were literate); and, further, that the production of books was a labor-intensive and rather expensive enterprise. If most of the population could not read, does that mean, for instance, that the study of early Christian texts provides us with only a window on elite culture and says nothing or precious little about the practices of ordinary Christians? Does it further mean (although Gamble does not treat this issue *in extenso*) that the presumption of literacy for liturgical leaders in the early church was another reason why women and/or "lower class" males did not hold those positions, since literacy was more an upper-class male than a female prerogative?

Gamble concludes, first of all, that the Christians favored the codex over the roll precisely because the former allowed for more random readings than the roll, which was designed for sequential reading. Second, the major use of the book was for public reading, thus pointing to the importance of the liturgical. Third, books were often produced to be read by more than the ostensible recipient (think, for example, of the letters of Paul) to whom the book might be addressed. Four, few whole Bibles were available for congregations; what might well have been the common case were anthologies or *florilegia* of the Hebrew Scriptures or New Testament texts to be read at the liturgy.

The practices of some Christian authors give us a window into what might have been the practice of many. The prolific Origen, for example, dictated to stenographers who turned their work over to scribes who would make a "fair copy" for the correction of the author who would, in turn, have fine copies made by calligraphers (who were, interestingly enough, women). Augustine would send a completed book to a friend who, as it were, acted as a "literary agent," lending copies to be transcribed in order to provide for wider circulation.

Gamble has interesting pages on the development of Christian libraries in an-

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tiquity; on the private ownership and use of books; on the slow clericalization of the office of the lector for the liturgy; on the relationship of book production and the canonization of the New Testament; and on the use of books as sacred objects subject to such uses as divinization and even the wearing of texts as amulets.

However, what comes across most strikingly is that books and reading had functions quite different and that literacy had a vastly different significance in early Christianity than it does today. In fact, reading this book made me wonder whether or not we need to reflect on the function of books in the contemporary church as we now enter the world of cyberspace. At least once, on a plane trip, I saw a fellow traveler reading the New Testament on the screen of a laptop. How, I thought, does one underline? How does one go about reading and reflecting while walking (something I like to do)? What would it mean if computer screens replaced psalters in monastic choirs, as someone suggested to me they well might?

In sum: an enormously instructive and provocative work on an original topic. I recommend it highly to anyone with an interest in Christian history and a taste for future-oriented speculation.

In the last decades of the sixteenth century, Rome was a city of intense cultural vibrancy. Rubens, Bernini, Caravaggio, Borromini were adding to the artistic patrimony left by such high Renaissance figures as Raphael and Michelangelo. Baronius was the reigning historian,

Right Thinking and Sacred Oratory in Counter-Reformation Rome,
by Frederick J. McGinness,
Princeton University Press, $49.50, 337 pp.

and Jesuit theologians like Bellarmine and Suarez were constructing the edifice of baroque scholasticism. The horrors of the sack of the city were a distant memory and the Council of Trent, having finished its work, gave warrant for a militant Catholicism.

McGinness studies this fertile period by a close focus on the preachers who exercised their rhetorical skills in the papal court. I say "rhetorical" because the humanist emphasis on the *ars rhetorica* had made a profound mark on the sermonic culture of the time. The old medieval *ars predicandi* as well as the late-medieval scholastic doctrinal sermon had given way to a sermon style which married the tropes of rhetoric to the militant theology derived from Trent and the *Roman Catechism*. The purpose of this preaching, however, was not so much instruction in doctrine as it was persuasion, moral change, and advancement in piety.

The inspiration behind this theory of preaching was, of course, Saint Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* in which the bishop of Hippo argued for the legitimacy of marrying pagan rhetoric to the exegesis and proclamation of the Scriptures. Augustine argued for the right to do this by telling his readers that the Children of Israel were allowed to take some Egyptian treasures with them when they went out into the desert. By extension, Christians were allowed some of the pagan rhetorical treasures to understand the Word of God.

In separate chapters McGinness reads the extant sermon literature and describes how these papal preachers (drawn both from the Roman colleges and the curias of the large religious orders) erected rhetorically charged sermonic visions of the church militant with the triumphant Christ at its apex as a mirror image of the Vicar of Christ who stood at the center of a "right thinking" and organically coherent Roman church. The total concept that emerges from this literature is a vision of a *republica christiana* in which the single parts of worship, governance, social activity, and intellectual inquiry interlock into a harmonious whole centered around the Chair of Peter.

Although the idealized picture of Rome and *Romanita'* may have been somewhat excessive, McGinness notes that the biting criticisms of Roman immorality, common enough in the earlier part of the century, now were replaced with great efforts of moral renewal as well as practical schemes to make Rome an exemplar of what the papal preachers set out in their sermons.

In passing, McGinness provides interesting information about, among other things, the shape of papal liturgies, educational ideals, the style in which sermons were actually delivered, and, alas too little, hints about how the rhetorical pictures of the sermons might have been replicated in some of the visual arts of the time.

This study is impressively researched (nearly half the book consists of notes and bibliographies) and very well written. I would especially recommend it to the-

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ologians. They will find descriptions of a sermonic literature in it which, shorn of its tropes and conceits, hardened into the ecclesiology that was standard fare in scholastic manuals until the theological revolution started by Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac and others became crystallized into Vatican II's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (*Lumen gentium*). While it is true, as McGinness is at pains to note, that the papal preachers in the *seicento* broke with the scholastic sermon when preaching before the pope, they were still hard at work on the manuals when they were in their rooms at the Collegio Romano and other centers of theological learning in the Eternal City. There is, in my estimation, more than an incidental connection between the *concetto* of the papal preacher and the ecclesiology produced, say, by someone like Robert Bellarmine. □

Lawrence S. Cunningham *teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame.*

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

The key question

By hindsight, it was evidently foolish of the Roman magisterium to associate infallibility with women's ordination, and to rely on the untenable argument that all the apostles Jesus chose were males. The issue of women's ordination must be considered on its merits, and the key question is whether it would be good for the priesthood and the church, and whether it is needed to satisfy women's demand for equality in the church.

Were there a male/female priesthood, of a certainty celibacy would have to go. Male and female priests could not live celibate lives in a single parish rectory; even close association of single male and female priests might be a cause of scandal. We don't need more publicity of this kind.

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ent matter, will not answer the question whether any change is needed for the sake of the priesthood and the church.

JOHN BRANIGAN
Staten Island, N.Y.

Whose relevance?

What the Vatican has done with respect to the ordination of women is reaffirm a tradition of nearly 2,000 years initiated by Jesus Christ. Why does it anger you [editorial, December 1, 1995] that the Vatican doesn't treat such a truth cavalierly? Would it not be a gross abuse of the Petrine ministry to ignore the tradition received from Christ? Or is an authoritative, arbitrary papacy okay if it supports women's ordination?

You express concern that the church won't be "relevant." Whose relevance? Is late-twentieth-century American culture to determine what is truth for the Mystical Body of Christ?

It is understandable that some may favor ordination of women, or at least wonder, as I formerly did, "why not?" But to place such sentiment on the level of "conviction" is ridiculous. Faith in Christ and recognition of the church, imperfect as she is, as the true church, rest on far more profound realities. No one has a right to be ordained. It is not a "justice issue."

You invoke "the sense of the faithful," a much-bandied-about expression. Who determines the sense of the faithful, and how? A *New York Times*/CBS News poll? By that measure, the faithful favor the death penalty. Shall the bishops rush to change their teaching?

Meantime, there's plenty for the faithful to concern themselves with and to have convictions about: Christ, the Beatitudes, truth, goodness, beauty, and unity.

GEOFFREY B. GNEUHS
New York, N.Y.

Most favored nation

The Chinese dissident, Wei Jingsheng, is courageous, correct, and deserving of international support, yet his case has been neglected by the American press since his imprisonment last December. I was pleased, therefore, to see Robert Senser's essay on Wei and U.S.-China policy [March 8].

It was a good piece. Readers should be wary, however, of Senser's assertion that China "never should have been granted the status of a "Most Favored Nation." Many Americans oppose China's MFN status not for economic or strategic reasons, but because of confusion caused by the phrase *most favored*. How, they ask, can we *favor*, let alone favor *most*, a government that slaughters students and locks up advocates of democracy?

The answer to that reasonable question is that "most favored" is a misnomer. "Most" implies that MFN is an exclusive trading status, and "favored" implies that it is extended as a token of moral approval. It is neither. MFN is nothing more than the common trading status given to all but a handful of nations. We grant MFN to China for the same reason we grant it anywhere: because it is in our national interest to do so.

MFN also serves the interest of the Chinese people. China is a police state; the Beijing government treats people as chattel. Still, since the early '80s, Beijing has allowed the masses increased access to foreign products and ideas, freer markets, and broader scope for individual expression.

The United States contributes to this, not through specific policies, but through the mere fact of our existence. The power and character of U.S. institutions and the exuberance of American culture have catalyzed much that is good and new in China. The urban middle class that is emerging as a result of reform represents China's best hope for creating a more human society.

Senser regrets that our government "is encumbered by extensive American entanglement with the Beijing regime." But extensive entanglement is precisely what we need, and it is what we shall have whether we plan for it or not. It is better to plan.

ROBERT DALY
Ithaca, N.Y.

The writer served as a diplomat at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing from 1987 to 1991.

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Our Father, our Mother

Because the English liturgy and the English Bible have used masculine words for God over the centuries, I see no reason to change them, especially in such traditional uses as the "Our Father" and "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

Still, I find John Cort's arguments for using only the masculine forms unacceptable ["God Is Not an It," November 17, 1995]. It's true that Jesus used masculine words for God; those were the words available to him in the language he spoke. Using John Cort's logic, perhaps we should use only the Aramaic terms, following the example of the Muslims who use only Arabic because that was the language used by Mohammed in the Qu'ran; the words must not be translated because they are the words of God. But that approach seems to me fundamentalist.

While I gladly use masculine words for God, I see no reason not to use feminine terms as well, to enrich our understanding of so great a mystery. Discovering the feminine aspects of God can help us make better sense of the whole of creation and our place in its continuation. So: Smile; let us rejoice in our Father-Mother.

JOAN LORENTZ
Cambridge, Mass.

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IN HER PRIME

Mark Morelli

My brother described somebody as being "dumb as a mud fence." It had been years since I'd heard that phrase and it had a fun, folksy ring to it, so I jotted it down for later use as an example of a simile in the writing class that I taught. I read it aloud to my students but no one understood. I suggested that they could be excused since few of them in this inner-city university had ever seen a mud fence.

One young man let out a laugh. He said, with self-effacement, "Maybe we don't get it because we are all dumb as a mud fence."

"No one here is really dumb," I said, poised to launch into my everyone-is-good-at-something pep talk. But this young man—who wore his cap backwards, which he said made sense since he was dyslexic—stopped me in my tracks.

"No, it's cool, that's why I'm here. I'm dumb. And I'm here for you to fix my dumbness. Like when you go to the hospital to fix a tumor or a hernia. You go to college to fix being dumb."

"I guess that makes me the doctor," I said.

"Just don't ask me to turn my head and cough," he said. While everyone laughed, I was thinking of his analogy (if he didn't get the simile, at least he made up for it), and I recalled another comparison. The noted author and writing instructor William Zinsser sees writing teachers as social workers because they're trying to reverse the habits of students whose literacy problems are deep-rooted and whose lives are entrenched in a quick-blinking imagistic society that less and less values reading and writing. Zinsser asks, "Why would anyone in his right mind want to be a writing teacher? The answer is that writing teachers aren't altogether in their right mind. They are in one of the caring professions, no more sane in their allotment of time and energy than the social worker."

This calls to mind a rather overly zealous writing teacher I recently encountered. She taught an early morning class next to mine. She didn't exactly love teaching but loved herself for being a teacher. The world, like Gershwin's Rockies and Gibraltar, would tumble and crumble were it not for her efforts.

One morning, in the hallway, I was shaking bits of chalk like dice. Guessing I was a fellow teacher, she introduced herself. "I'm Mizz Knotts Hyphen Marshall."

"Nice to meet you. Another day in the jungle, eh?" I said.

Knotts Hyphen Marshall set me straight. "Another day in heaven, you mean. This work can be burdensome, but oh, what a velvet yoke upon our shoulders."

Her eyes locked into mine. Ms. Knotts Hyphen Marshall knew all about effective communication (she made charts on the board demonstrating Effective Communication, with circles and arrows). I could tell she wanted to talk teacher-to-teacher.

I took a quick peek into my classroom, then joked, "Let's keep it down. It'd be a shame to wake them."

She was open-mouthed stunned.

"It'd be a shame *not* to open their eyes," she said with Arthurian majesty. (*Bea* Arthurian, for she had a deep voice.) "We have a responsibility to these kids. Often we're the only ones they can confide in."

Wonderful, I thought. To have as your only confidante a guy who's looking for comma splices and spelling mistakes. That's like calling an ambulance, then bragging that you have a date with a paramedic.

"I hug my students," she said, "because in this dehumanizing world, they cannot afford to forget that they are human. I substituted at an inner-city school where they rebelled against me. They hated me. They hated me because I cared. They didn't understand that adults could respect them and find worth in them. They didn't understand that learning is linked to love."

"Say, that patchouli becomes you."

"Thank you. I hope it's not overpowering."

"No," I said, but she could've opened a metaphysical bookshop right there.

"Good. I don't want my essence to intrude upon my students' focus. Because it's all for the kids, all for the kids." Ms. Knotts Hyphen Marshall looked past me. "I was threatened by students who later hugged me." She was one thumb up the bat on me. "I remember a young woman named Julie, whose father died two weeks before the semester began. She sat in her chair, hating me, hating school, hating the world. And yes—hating herself. She came to my office, bursting with hostility. She said, 'My father is dead and you're alive and that's not fair.'"

Though I didn't know the man, I didn't think it was fair either.

"Well, I just hugged Julie. She resisted at first, but I persisted. Soon poor Julie was hugging me back. Oh, how we both wept. She wrote a paper about me. There were some wonderful ideas in it, but she insisted upon calling me Miss, which I had a lot of trouble with. So after three warnings I had her transferred to another class."

"Is that so?

The clock struck eight. We went into our rooms to teach. I was winded by my exchange. My sloe-eyed students groaned and sluggishly opened their books. I asked, "Did you ever talk to someone who made you feel dumb as a mud fence?"

One kid in the corner who had grown up on a farm smiled and nodded. I felt like giving him a hug, but on second thought, he was doing just fine without one. □

Mark Morelli, *a free-lance writer from River Edge, New Jersey, is the editor of* PAH!, *a newsletter of humor and commentary.*

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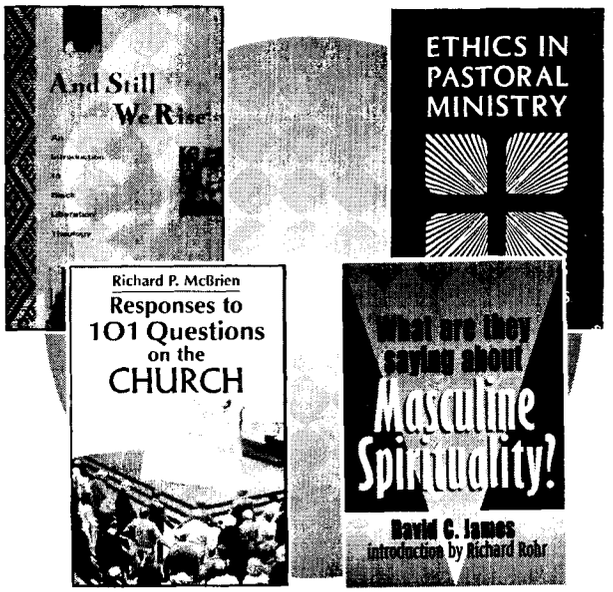
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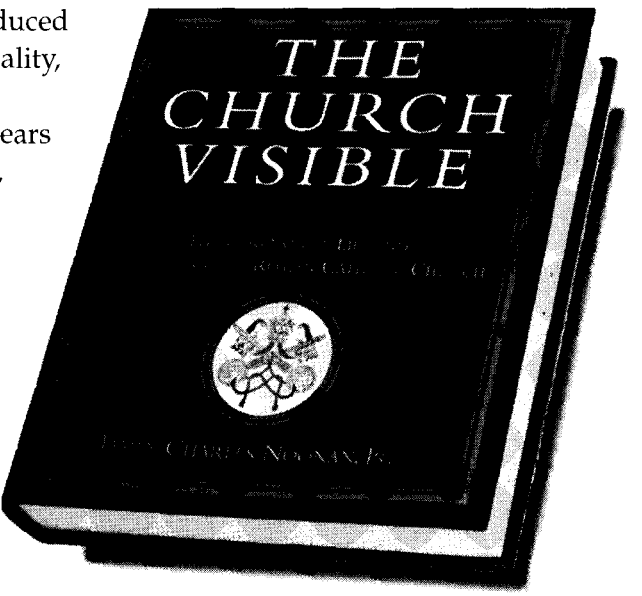

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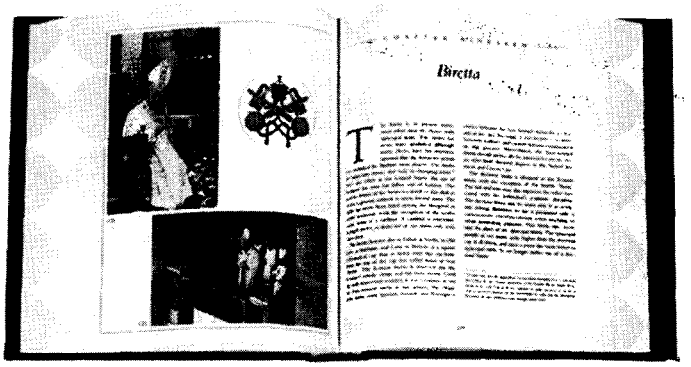

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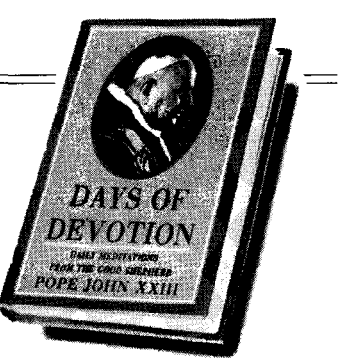

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